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YOLANDE



YOLANDE

The Story of a Daughter

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'MACLEOD OF DARE,' 'A PRINCESS OF THULE,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
"DIR, O STILLES THAL, GRUSS ZUM LETZTENMAL!"	I

CHAPTER II.

AN ABDUCTION	21
------------------------	----

CHAPTER III.

A BEGINNING	42
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

AWAKING	68
-------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

"O' BYGANE DAYS AND ME"	83
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER VI.

A GUESS	103
-------------------	-----

CHAPTER VII.

	PAGE
A MESSAGE	124

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST INTERVENTION	143
-------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER IX.

LOOSENED CHAINS	162
---------------------------	-----

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUR OF VENGEANCE	181
---------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS SITUATION	200
--------------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XII.

A SPY	221
-----------------	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

SNOW AND SUNLIGHT	242
-----------------------------	-----

CHAPTER XIV.

A MEETING	262
---------------------	-----

CHAPTER XV.

	PAGE
ROME	283

CHAPTER XVI.

VENICE	297
------------------	-----

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION	312
----------------------	-----

YOLANDE.

CHAPTER I.

“DIR, O STILLES THAL, GRUSS ZUM
LETZTENMAL !”

THE train roared and jangled through the long black night ; and always before her shut but sleepless eyes rose vision after vision of that which she was leaving for ever behind—her girlhood. So quiet and beautiful, so rich in affection and kindness, that appeared to her now ; she could scarce believe that it was herself she saw, in those recurrent scenes, so glad and joyous and light-hearted. That was all over. Already it seemed far away. She beheld herself walking with her father along the still valley, in the moonlight ; or out on the blue waters of the loch, with the sun hot on the gunwale of the boat ; or away up on the lonely hillsides, where the neigh-

bourhood of the watercourses was marked by a wandering blaze of gold—widespread masses of the yellow saxifrage ; or seated at the head of the dinner-table, with her friends laughing and talking ; and all that life was grown distant now. She was as one expelled from Paradise. And sometimes, in spite of herself—in spite of all her wise and firm resolves—her heart would utter to itself a sort of cry of despair. Why did he refuse her that bit of a flower to take away with her ? It was so small a thing. And then she thought of the look of his eyes as he regarded her ; of the great pity and tenderness shining there ; and of the words of courage and hope that he had spoken to her as she left. Well, she would show herself worthy of his faith in her. She would force away from her those idle regrets over a too-beautiful past. A new life was opening before her ; she was content to accept whatever it might bring. Who could grudge to her this long, last review of the life she was leaving for ever ? Farewell—farewell ! She was not even carrying away with her a bit of a leaf or a blossom, to awaken memories, in the after time, of the

garden in which she had so often stood in the white clear air, with the sunlight all around her. Well, it was better so. And perhaps in the new life that she was entering she would find such duties and occupations as would effectually prevent the recurrence of this long night's torture—this vision-building out of the past, this inexplicable yearning, this vain stretching out of the hands to that she was leaving for ever.

Towards morning she slept a little, but not much ; however, on the first occasion of her opening her eyes, she found that the gray light of the new day was around her. For an instant a shock of fear overcame her—a sudden sense of helplessness and affright. She was so strangely situated ; she was drawing near the great, dread city ; she knew not what lay before her ; and she felt so much alone. Despite herself, tears began to trickle down her face, and her lips were tremulous. This new day seemed terrible, and she was helpless—and alone.

“Dear me, Miss,” said Jane, happening to wake up at this moment, “what is the matter ?”

“It is nothing,” her young mistress said. “I—I have scarcely slept at all these two nights, and I feel rather weak and—and—not very well. It is no matter.”

But the tears fell faster now; and this sense of weakness and helplessness completely overpowered her. She fairly broke down.

“I will tell you what it is,” she sobbed, in a kind of recklessness of despair. “It is that I have undertaken to do what is beyond me. I am not fit for it. They have asked too much of me. It is beyond what I can do. What can I do?—when I feel that I should be happy if I could only lie down and die, and be the cause of no more trouble to any one!”

The maid was very much startled by these words, though she little guessed the cause of them. And indeed her young mistress very speedily—and by a force of will that she did not suspect herself of possessing—put an end to this half-hysterical fit. She drew herself up erect; she dried her eyes; and she told Jane that as soon as they got to the hotel she would go to bed for an hour or two and try to get some sleep; for that really this long fit

of wakefulness had filled her head with all sorts of ridiculous fancies.

And that was the last sign of weakness. Pale her face might be, as she set about the undertaking of this duty ; but she had steeled her heart. Fortunately, when they got to the hotel, and when she had had some breakfast, she was able to snatch an hour or two's sound and refreshing sleep in the silence of her own room ; and when she reappeared even the dull-witted Jane noticed how much better and brisker she looked. Nay, there was even a kind of hopefulness and cheerfulness in the way she set about making her preparations. And first of all she told Jane fully and frankly of the errand on which she had come to London ; and this, as it turned out, was a wise thing to do ; for the good Jane regarded the whole situation, and her probable share in the adventure, with a stolid self-sufficiency which was as good as any courage. Oh, she said, she was not afraid of such people ! Probably she knew better how to manage them than a young lady would. They wouldn't frighten her ! And she not obscurely hinted that, if there was any kind

of incivility going on, she was quite capable of giving as good as she got.

Yolande had resolved, among other things, that, while she would implicitly obey Mr. Melville's instructions about making that appeal to her mother entirely unaided and unaccompanied, she might also prudently follow her father's advice and get such help as was necessary, with regard to preliminary arrangements, from his solicitors; more especially as she had met one of those gentlemen two or three times, and so far was on friendly terms with him. Accordingly, one of the first things she did was to get into a cab, accompanied by her maid, and drive to the offices of Lawrence and Lang in Lincoln's-inn-fields. She asked for Mr. Lang; and by and by was shown into that gentleman's room. He was a tall, elderly person, with white hair, a shrewd, thin face, and humorous, good-natured smile.

"Take a seat, Miss Winterbourne," said he. "Very lucky you came now. In another ten minutes I should have been off to seek you at the —— Hotel; and we should have crossed each other."

“But how did you know I was at the — Hotel?” she said, with a stare of astonishment.

“Oh, we lawyers are supposed to know everything,” he answered, good-naturedly. “And I may tell you that I know of the business that has brought you to London; and that we shall be most happy to give you all the assistance in our power.”

“But how can you know?” the girl said, bewildered. “It was only the day before yesterday I decided to go; and it was only this morning I reached London. Did my papa write to you, then, without telling me?”

“My dear young lady, if I were to answer your questions, you would no longer believe in the omniscience of lawyers!” he said, with his grave smile. “No, no; you must assume that we know everything. And let me tell you that the step you are taking, though it is a bold one, deserves to be successful; perhaps it will be successful because it is a bold one. I hope so. But you must be prepared for a shock. Your mother has been ill.”

“Ah!” said Yolande—but no more. She held her hands clasped.

“I say she *has* been ill,” said this elderly suave person, who seemed to regard the girl with a very kindly interest. “Now she is better. Three weeks ago my clerk found her unable to sign the receipt that he usually brings away with him ; and I was about to write to your father, when I thought I would wait a day or two and see ; and, fortunately she got a little better. However, you must be prepared to find her looking ill ; and—and—well, I was going to say she might be incapable of recognising you ; but I forgot. In the meantime we shall be pleased to be of every assistance to you in our power ; in fact, we have been instructed to consider you as under our protection. I hope you find the—— Hotel comfortable ?”

“Oh yes—oh yes,” Yolande said, absently ; she was not thinking of any hotel ; she was thinking in what way these people could be of help to her.

“Of course,” said he, “when you go to see your mother, I could send some one with you, if you wished it ; or I would go with you myself, for that matter ; but I understand that is not considered desirable.”

“Oh no,” said she; “I must go alone. I wish to see her alone.”

“As for your personal safety,” said he, “that need not alarm you. Your friends may be anxious about you, no doubt; but the very worst that can happen will be a little impertinence. You won’t mind that. I shall have a policeman in plain clothes standing by; if your maid should consider it necessary, she can easily summon him to you. She will be inside; he outside; so you have nothing to fear.”

“Then you know all how it has been arranged!” she exclaimed.

“Why, yes; it is our business here to know everything,” said he, laughing, “though we are not allowed sometimes to say how we came by the information. Now what else can we do for you? Let me see. If your poor mother will go with you, you might wish to take her to some quiet seaside place, perhaps, for her health?”

“Oh yes; I wish to take her away from London at once!” Yolande said, eagerly.

“Well, a client of ours has just left some lodgings at Worthing—in fact, we have

recommended them, on one or two occasions, and we have been told that they gave satisfaction. The rooms are clean and nicely furnished, and the landlady is civil and obliging. She is a gentlewoman, in short, in reduced circumstances, but not over-reaching. I think you might safely take the rooms."

"Will you give me the address, if you please?"

He wrote the address on a card, and gave it her.

"But do not trouble to write," said he; "we will do that for you, and arrange terms."

"But I must go down to see the place first," said she. "I can go there and get back in one day—to-morrow—can I not?"

"But why should you give yourself so much trouble?" he said.

"What a daughter can do for her own mother, that is not called trouble," she answered, simply. "Is Worthing a large town?"

"No; not a large town. It is one of the smaller watering-places."

"But one could hire there a pony and a pony-chaise?"

“Undoubtedly.”

“And could one take the rooms and hire the pony and pony-chaise conditionally?”

“I don’t quite understand you.”

“Could one say, ‘Yes, I shall want these most likely; but if I telegraph to you to-morrow or next day that I do not want them, then there is no bargain and there is nothing to pay’?”

“I have no doubt they would make that arrangement with you. That would be merely reserving the refusal for you for a certain number of days.”

“Two days at the most,” said Yolande, who seemed to have studied this matter—even as she used to study the details of her future housekeeping at Allt-nam-ba when she was sitting on the deck of the great steamer with the Mediterranean sea around her.

“May I presume to ask,” said he, “whether you are sufficiently supplied with money? We have no instructions from your father; but we shall be pleased if you consider us your bankers.”

“I have only eight or nine pounds,” said she, “in money; but also I have three

blank cheques which my papa signed : that is enough, is it not ? ”

“ Well, yes, I should say that was enough,” he remarked, with a perfectly subdued irony. “ But those blank cheques are dangerous things, if you will permit me to say so. I would strongly advise you, my dear Miss Winterbourne, to destroy them ; and to send to us for such sums as you may want from time to time. That would be much the safer plan. And if there is any other particular in which we can be of the least assistance to you, you will please let us know. We can always send some one to you, and a telegram from Worthing only costs a shilling. As we have received such strict injunctions about looking after you, we must keep up our character as your guardian.”

“ I thought you said my papa had not sent you any instructions ? ” Yolande exclaimed again.

“ About the cheques, my dear young lady,” said he, promptly.

“ Then I wish you to tell me something of those people—I wish to know who and what they are.”

“I think, Miss Winterbourne,” said he, gravely, “that the information would not edify you much.”

“But I wish to know,” said she; “I wish to know the sort of people one must expect to find there.”

“The facts are simple, then. He is a drunken scoundrel, to put the matter shortly. I believe he was once in a fairly good position—I rather think he was called to the Bar; but he never practised. Betting on races and drink finished him, between them. Then he tried to float a bit by marrying the proprietress of a public-house—an illiterate woman; but he drank through her money, and the public-house, and everything. Now they are supposed to let out this house in rooms: but, as that would involve trouble, my own impression is they have no lodgers but your mother, and are content to live on the very ample allowance that we are instructed to pay her monthly. Well, no doubt, they will be very angry if you succeed in taking away from them their source of income; and the man, if he is drunk, may be impertinent; but that is all you have to fear.

I would strongly advise you to go in the evening. Then the presence of the policeman in the street will not arouse suspicion ; and if there should be any trifling disturbance it will be less likely to attract the notice of bystanders. Might I ask—please forgive me if I am impertinent”—he said, “but I have known all about this sad story from the beginning, and I am naturally curious—may I ask whether the idea of your going to your mother, alone, and taking her away with you, alone, was a suggestion of your father’s ?”

“It was not,” said she, with downcast eyes. “It was the suggestion of a friend whose acquaintanceship—whose friendship—we made in the Highlands—a Mr. Melville.”

“Ah,” said he ; and he glanced at a card that was lying before him on the table. “It is bold—bold,” he added, musingly. “One thing is certain, everything else has failed. My dear young lady, I am afraid, however successful you may be, your life for some time to come will not be as happy and cheerful as one could wish for one of your age.”

“That I am not particular about,” said Yolande, absently.

“However, in a matter of this kind, it is not my place to advise : I am a servant only. You are going down to Worthing to-morrow ; I will give you a list of trains there and back, to save you the trouble of hunting through a time-table. You will be back in the evening. Now, do you think it desirable that I should get this man whom I mean to employ in your service to hang about the neighbourhood of the house to-morrow, just to get some notion of the comings and goings of the people ?”

“I think it would be most desirable,” Yolande said.

“Very well ; it shall be done. Let me see ; this is Thursday ; to-morrow you go to Worthing ; could you call here on Saturday to hear what the man has to say, or shall he wait on you at the —— Hotel ?”

“I would rather call here,” she said.

“Very well ; and what hour would be most convenient ?”

“Ten—is it too soon ?”

“Not at all,” said he, jotting down a memorandum on a diary before him. “Now one thing more. Will you oblige me by

burning those cheques ; I will write to your father, and take the responsibility."

"If you think it right I will," she said, "as soon as I go back to the hotel."

"And here," he continued, going to a safe and fetching out some Bank of England notes, "is £25 in £5 notes ; it is not so serious a matter if one of those should go astray. Please put these in your purse, Miss Winterbourne ; and when you want any further sums, you have only to write to us."

She thanked him, and rose, and bade him good-bye.

"Good-bye, Miss Winterbourne," said he, in a very friendly way ; "and please to remember that although, of course, all the resources of our firm are at your disposal, as a matter of business, still I hope you may count on us for something more than that, if there is any way we can help you—I mean in a private and personal way. If any such occasion should arise, please remember that your father and I were friends together in Slagpool five-and-thirty years ago ; and anything that I can do for his daughter will be a great pleasure to me."

As she left, she thought that London did not seem to be, after all, such a terrible place to be alone in. Here was protection, guardianship, friendship, and assistance put all around her at the very outset. There were no more qualms or sinkings of the heart now. When she got outside, it suddenly occurred to her that she would like to go away in search of the street in which her mother lived, and reconnoitre the house. Might there not be some chance of her coming out—the day was fairly fine for London? And how strange to see her mother walking before her. She felt sure she should recognise her. And then—perhaps—what if one were suddenly to discard all preparations?—what if she were to be quickly caught, and carried off, and transferred to the safety of the —— Hotel before any one could interfere?

But when she had ordered the cabman to drive to Oxford Circus, and got into the cab, along with Jane, she firmly put away from her all these wild possibilities. This undertaking was too serious a matter to be imperilled by any rashness. She might look at the street, at the house, at the windows; but not if her

mother were to come out and pass her by, touching her skirts even, would she declare herself. She was determined to be worthy of the trust that had been placed in her.

At Oxford Circus they dismissed the cab, and walked some short distance until they found the place they were in search of—a dull, respectable-looking, quiet, misty little thoroughfare, lying just back from the continuous roar of Oxford Street. She passed the house once or twice, too, knowing it by its number; but there was no sign of life in it. The small, curtained windows showed no one sitting there or looking out. She waited and waited; went to distant points, and watched; but, save for an occasional butcher's boy or postman, the street remained uniformly empty. Then she remembered that it was drawing towards the afternoon, and that poor Jane was probably starving; so she called another cab, and drove to the Hotel.

Next day was a busy day—after that life of quietude far away among the hills. She got to Worthing about twelve; and went straight to the lodgings that had been recommended by Mr. Lang, which she found in

one of the bright and cheerful-looking terraces fronting the sea. She was much pleased with the rooms, which were on the first floor—the sitting-room opening on to a balcony prettily decorated with flowers; and she also took rather a fancy to the little old lady herself, who was at first rather anxious and nervous, but who grew more friendly under the influence of Yolande's calm and patronising gentleness. Under the conditions mentioned to Mr. Lang, she took the rooms; and gave her name and address, and her father's name and address, adding, with the smallest touch of pride—

“Of course you know him by reputation.”

“Oh yes, indeed,” somewhat vaguely said this timid, pretty, little old lady, who was the widow of a clergyman, and whose sole and whole notion of politics was that the Radicals and other evil-disposed persons of that kind were plotting the destruction of the Church of England, which to her meant nothing more nor less than the swallowing up of the visible universe. “He is in Parliament, is he not?”

“Yes,” said Yolande; “and some people

wish he were not there. He is a little too honest and outspoken for them."

Next she went to a livery-stable keeper, and asked about his terms for the hire of a pony and pony-carriage. These terms seemed to her reasonable, but they were not ; for she was judging them by the Inverness standard, whereas that standard is abnormally high, for the reason that the Inverness livery-stable keepers have demands made on them for only two, or at most, three months in the year, and are quite content, for the other nine months, to lend out their large stock of horses for nothing to any of the neighbouring lairds or farmers who will take them and feed them. However, the matter was not a serious one.

The next morning she called at the office of Messrs. Lawrence and Lang ; heard what the man who had been posted in that little thoroughfare had to say ; and arranged that she should go alone to the house that evening at eight o'clock. She had no longer in her eyes the pretty timidity and bashfulness of a child ; she bore herself with the demeanour of a woman.

CHAPTER II.

AN ABDUCTION.

A FEW minutes before eight on that evening, in the thoroughfare just mentioned, a short, thick-set man was standing by a lamp-post, either trying to read, or pretending to read, an evening newspaper by the dull, yellow light. Presently a hansom cab drove up to the corner of the street and stopped there; and a taller and younger man got out and came along to the lamp-post.

“I would go a dozen yards nearer,” said the new-comer.

“Very well, sir,” said the other; and then he added: “The master of the house has just gone out, sir.”

“So much the better,” said the younger man, carelessly. “There will be the less bother—probably none at all. But you keep a little bit nearer, after the young lady has gone into the house.”

“Very well, sir.”

The new-comer apparently did not consider that any great vigilance or surveillance would be necessary ; but all the same, while he still left the hansom at the corner of the street, he walked along a few yards farther (glancing in passing at the windows of one of the houses), until he came to a narrow entry leading down into a courtyard ; and there a step or two into the gloom of the little passage effectually hid him from sight.

Punctually at eight o'clock, a four-wheeled cab appeared and drew up ; and Yolande got out, followed by her maid. Without delay or hesitation she crossed the pavement, and knocked at the door. A girl of about fifteen opened it.

“Is Mrs. Winterbourne within ?” said Yolande, calmly.

The girl eyed her doubtfully.

“Y—es, Miss.”

“I wish to see her, if you please.”

“Y—es, Miss—if you wait for a moment I'll go and tell missis.”

“No,” said Yolande, promptly—and she passed into the lobby without further ado.

“No; I will not trouble your mistress. Please show me where I shall find Mrs. Winterbourne; that is enough.”

Now the girl looked frightened; for the two strangers were inside; and she glanced behind her to see whether her mistress were not coming to her relief. Moreover, this tall young lady had an imperious way with her.

“Which is her room?”

“T—that is her sitting-room,” stammered the girl—indeed, they were all standing just outside the door of it.

“Thank you,” she said, and she put her hand on the handle of the door. “Jane, wait for me.” The next moment she was inside the room, and the door shut behind her.

A spasm of fear caught her and struck her motionless. Some one sat there—some one in a chair—idly looking into the fire—a newspaper flung aside. And what horror might not have to be encountered now? She had been warned; she had prepared herself; but still——

Then the next moment a great flood of pity and joy and gratitude filled her heart;

for the face that was turned to her—that regarded her with a mild surprise—though it was emaciated and pallid, was not unlovable ; and the eyes were large and strange and melancholy. This poor lady rose, and with a gentle curtsy regarded her visitor, and said—

“ I beg your pardon ; I did not hear you come into the room.”

What a strange voice—hollow and distant ; and it was clear that she was looking at this new-comer only with a vague, half-pleased curiosity, not with any natural wonder at such an intrusion. Yolande could not speak. She forgot all that she had meant to say. Her heart seemed to be choking her.

“ Mother,” she managed to say at length, “ you do not know, then, that I am your daughter ? ”

“ My Yolande ? ” she said—and she retreated a step, as if in fear. “ You are not my Yolande—you ? ”

She regarded her apparently with some strange kind of dread—as if she were an apparition. There was no wonder, or joy, or sudden impulse of affection.

“You—you cannot be my Yolande—my daughter?”

“But indeed I am, mother,” said the girl, with the tears running down her face in spite of herself. “Ah, it is cruel that I should come to you as a stranger—that you should have no word of kindness for me. But no matter. We shall soon make up for all these years. Mother, I have come to take you away. You must no longer be here, alone. You will come with me, will you not?”

The pale, emaciated, hollow-voiced woman came nearer now, and took Yolande’s hand, and regarded her with a kind of vague, pleased curiosity and kindness.

“And you are really my Yolande, then? How tall you are; and beautiful, too—like an angel. When I have thought of you, it was not like this. What beautiful, beautiful hair; and so straight you have grown, and tall! So they have sent you to me at last. But it is too late now—too late.”

“No, no, mother; it is not too late! You will come away with me, will you not—now—at once?”

The other shook her head sadly; and yet

it was obvious that she was taking more and more interest in her daughter—regarding her from top to toe, admiring her dress even, and all the time holding her hand.

“Oh no, I cannot go away with you,” she said. “It is not for you to be hampered with one like me. I am content. I am at peace here. I am quite happy here. You are young, rich, beautiful; you will have a beautiful life; everything beautiful round you. It is so strange to look at you! And who sent you? The lawyers, I suppose. What do they want now? Why do they not let me alone?”

She let the girl's hand fall, and turned away dejectedly, and sank down into the easy-chair again, with a sigh. But Yolande was mistress of herself now. She went forward, put her hand upon her mother's shoulder, and said firmly—

“Mother, I will not allow you to remain here. It is not a fit place for you. I have come to take you away myself; the lawyers have not sent me; they want nothing. Dear mother, do make up your mind to come away with me—now!”

Her entreaty was urgent ; for she could hear distinctly that there were some “high words” being bandied in the lobby ; and she wished to get her mother away without any unseemly squabble.

“Do, mother ! Everything is ready. You and I will go away together to Worthing ; and the sea air and the country drives will soon make you well again. I have got everything prepared for you—pretty rooms fronting the sea ; and a balcony where you can sit and read ; and I have a pony carriage to take you for drives through the lanes. Ah, now, to think it is your own daughter who is asking you ! You cannot refuse ! You cannot refuse !”

She had risen again, and taken Yolande’s hand ; but her look was hesitating, bewildered.

“They will be angry,” said she, timidly ; for now the dissension without was clearly audible.

“Who, then ?” said Yolande, proudly. “You will leave them to me, mother ; I am not afraid. Ah, if you saw how much prettier the rooms are at Worthing !—yes ; and no

longer you will have to sit alone by yourself in the evening. Come, mother !”

At this moment the door opened ; and a short, stout, red-faced, black-haired woman made her appearance. It was clear that the altercation with Jane had not improved her temper.

“ I beg your pardon, young lady,” said she, with studied deference, “ but I want to know what this means.”

Yolande turned, with flashing eyes.

“ Leave the room !”

For a second the woman was cowed by her manner ; but the next moment she had bridled up again.

“ Leave the room, indeed ! Leave the room—in my own house ! Not until I’m paid. And what’s more, the poor dear lady isn’t going to be taken away against her will. She knows who her friends are. She knows who have looked after her and nursed her. She shan’t be forced away from the house against her will, I warrant you.”

“ Leave the room this instant, or I will send for a policeman !” Yolande said ; and she had drawn herself up to her full height ;

for her mother, poor creature, was timidly shrinking behind her.

“A policeman! Hoity-toity!” said the other, with her little black eyes sparkling. “You’d better have no policeman in here. It’s not them that are robbing a poor woman that should call for a policeman. But you haven’t taken her with you yet; and what’s more, she shan’t move an inch out of this house until every farthing that’s owing to us is paid—that she shan’t. We’re not going to be robbed, so long as there’s the law. Not till every farthing is paid, I warrant you!—so perhaps you’ll let the poor dear lady alone, and leave her in the care of them that she knows to be her friends. A policeman, indeed! Not one step shall she budge until every farthing of her debt is paid!”

Now for the moment Yolande was completely disconcerted. It was a point she had not foreseen; it was a point, therefore, on which she had asked no counsel. She had been assured by Mr. Lang that she had nothing to fear in taking away her mother from this house—that she was acting strictly within her legal rights. But how about this

question of debt? Could they really detain her? Outwardly, however, she showed no symptom of this sudden doubt. She said to the woman with perfect calmness—

“Your impertinence will be of little use to you. My mother is going with me; I am her guardian; if you interfere with me, it will be at your own peril. If my mother owes you anything, it will be paid.”

“How am I to know that? Here she is, and here she shall remain, until every farthing is paid. We are not going to be robbed in that way!”

“I tell you that whatever is owing to you will be paid,” said Yolande. “You need not pretend that you have any fear of being robbed; you know you will be paid. And now, I wish you to tell me where my mother’s things are. Which is her bedroom?”

“I’ll show you whether you can ride the high horse over me!” said the woman, with her eyes glittering with anger. “I’ll go and fetch my husband—that I will.” And the next second she had left the room and the house too—running out into the night bare-headed.

“Now, mother,” said Yolande, quickly, “now is our chance! Where are your things? Oh, you must not think of packing anything; we will send for what you want to-morrow. But do you really owe these people anything?”

“I don’t know,” said her mother, who seemed to have been terrified by this threat on the part of the woman.

“Well, then, where is your hat?—where is your shawl? Where is your room?”

Almost mechanically she opened the folding-doors that formed one side of the apartment, disclosing beyond a bedroom. Yolande preceded her, picked up the things she wanted, and helped her to put them on.

“Come, now, mother; we will get away before they come back. Oh, you need not be afraid. Everything is arranged for you. There is a cab waiting for us outside.”

“Who is in it?” said the mother, drawing back with a gesture of fear.

“Why, no one at all!” said Yolande, cheerfully. “But my maid is just outside, in the passage. Come along, mother!”

“Where are we going?”

“To the hotel where I am staying, to be sure! Everything is arranged for you—we are to have supper together—you and I—all by ourselves. Will that please you, mother?”

“Wait for a moment, then.”

She went back into the bedroom; and almost instantly reappeared—glancing at Yolande with a quick furtive look that the girl did not understand. She understood after.

“Come, then!”

She took her mother by the hand and led her as if she were a child. In the lobby they encountered Jane; and Jane was angry.

“Another minute, Miss, and I would have turned her out by the shoulders!” she said, savagely.

“Oh, it is all right,” said Yolande, briskly. “Everything is quite right! Open the door, Jane—there’s a good girl.”

They had got out from the house, and were indeed crossing the pavement, when the landlady again made her appearance, coming hurriedly up in the company of a man who looked like (what he was) a butler out of employment, and who was obviously drunk.

He began to hector and bully. He interposed himself between them and the cab.

“You aint going away like this! You aint going to rob poor people like this! You come back into the house until we settle this affair.”

Now Yolande's only aim was to get clear of the man and to get her mother put into the cab; but he stood in front of her, whichever way she made the attempt; and at last he put his hand on her arm, to force her back to the house. It was an unfortunate thing for him that he did so. There was a sudden crash; the man reeled back, staggered, and then fell like a log on to the pavement; and Yolande, bewildered by the instantaneous nature of the whole occurrence, only knew that something like a black shadow had gone swiftly by. All this appeared to have happened in a moment; and in that same moment here was the policeman in plain clothes, whom she knew by sight.

“What a shame to strike the poor man!” said he to the landlady, who was on her knees, shrieking, by the side of her husband. “But he aint much hurt, mum. I'll help him in-

doors, mum. I'm a constable, I am ; I wish I knew who done that ; I'd have the law agin him."

As he uttered these words of consolation, he regarded the prostrate man with perfect equanimity ; and a glance over his shoulder informed him that, in the confusion, Yolande and her mother and the maid had got into the cab and driven off. Then he proceeded to raise the stupefied ex-butler, who certainly had received a "facer ;" but who presently came to himself as near as the fumes of rum would allow. Nay, he helped, or rather steadied, the man into the house ; and assured the excited landlady that the law would find out who had committed this outrage ; but he refused the offer of a glass of something, on the plea that he was on duty. Then he took down the number of the house in his notebook and left.

As he walked along the street, he was suddenly accosted by the tall, broad-shouldered young man who had disappeared into the narrow entry.

"Why weren't you up in time ?" said the latter, angrily.

“Lor, sir, you was so quick!”

“Is that drunken idiot hurt?”

“Well, sir, he may ’ave a black eye in the morning—maybe a pair on ’em. But ’taint no matter. He’ll think he run agin a lamp-post. He’s as drunk as drunk.”

“What was the row about?—I couldn’t hear a word.”

“Why, sir, they said as the lady owed them something.”

“Oh, that was the dodge. However, it’s all settled now; very well settled. Let me see, I suppose Lawrence and Lang pay you?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you know, I don’t think you did your best. You weren’t sharp enough. When you saw that drunken brute seize hold of the young lady’s arm, you should have been there—on the spot—on the instant——”

“Lor, sir, you was so quick!—and the man went over like a ninepin——”

“Well, the affair is satisfactory as it stands,” said the younger and taller man; “and I am well satisfied, and so I suppose you don’t mind my adding a sovereign to what Lawrence and Lang will give you.”

“Thank ye, sir,” said the man, touching his cap.

“Here you are, then. Good-night.”

“Good-night, sir.”

Then the younger man walked on to the corner of the street ; jumped into the hansom that was still awaiting him there ; called through the trap-door to the driver “United University Club, corner of Suffolk Street, Pall Mall,” and so was driven off.

That same night Yolande wrote the following letter to her father :—

“MY DEAR PAPA—I wish that I might write this letter in French, for my heart is so full ; but I know you would not like it, so I will do my best in English. It is all over and settled ; my mother is with me—in this room where I am writing—reading a little, but not so agitated by the events of the day, or rather this evening, that one might expect. It is I who am agitated ; please forgive any errors. But, oh, it was the saddest thing ever seen in the world, for a mother to be standing opposite her own daughter, and not caring for her—not knowing her. We were

two strangers. But my heart was glad. I had had the apprehension that I should have to overcome emotions; that it might be only duty that would keep me by her side; but no, no, when I saw her face, and her gentle eyes, I said to myself how easy would be the task of loving her as a daughter should. Dear papa, she is so ill; and also she seems so far away and absorbed and sad. She is only a little interested in me—only a little. But yet I think she is pleased. I have shown her what wardrobe I have with me, and that pleased her a little; but it is I who will have to be the guardian, and buy things for her. She was pleased with my dressing-bag; and to-morrow I am going to buy her the most beautiful one I can get in London. Mr. Lang asked me to burn the three blank cheques you gave me; and I did that; and I am to have money from him; but after the dressing-bag, I hope there will not be much expense; for we shall be living quietly at Worthing, and I know that when you gave Mrs. Graham the expensive piece of broderie at Cairo you will not grudge me that I give my mother a beautiful dressing-bag.

“It has all happened just as Mr. Melville planned; how he could have foreseen so much I cannot tell; perhaps it is that I followed to his instructions as nearly as I could. The people were insolent somewhat; but to me, not to my mother; so that is right. But at the end, when we were coming away, the man seized me, and then I was frightened—he wished me to go back into the house—and then, I know not how, he was struck and fell,—perhaps by the policeman it was, but I did not stay to look; I hurried my mother into the cab, and we are here safe and sound. Poor Jane is so angry. She demands to go back to-morrow, to recover some things of my mother’s, and also that she wants to ‘have it out’ with the woman because of the way she spoke to me; but this I will not allow; I shall write to Messrs. Lawrence and Lang to-night to send some one; also to pay whatever is owing.

“She has just come over and stroked my hair, and gone back to her chair again; I think she is a little more affectionate to me now; and oh! I am so anxious to get away to the sea air, that it may wake her out of

this lethargy. I know it will ; I am sure of it. We have got such cheerful rooms. The address, dear papa, is Arbutus Villa, — Terrace, Worthing ; please give it to Duncan, and tell him to send me each week a brace of grouse, a brace of black game, one or two hares, and any odd ptarmigan or snipe you may get ; then I will know that they are good. To-night we had supper together ; alas ! she ate scarcely anything. I asked if she would have a little wine—no ; she seemed to have a horror of it—even to be frightened. She came round the table, and took me by the hand, and begged of me to be always with her. I said was not that what I had come for ? She said, with such a strange voice, ‘ I need help—I need help ; ’ and I answered that now everything was to be reversed, and that I was to be the mother to her, and to take charge of her. Then she cried a little ; but I think she was pleased with me ; and when I said that I wanted to write a letter, after we had finished, she said she would read until I had written the letter, and then that she wished to hear where I had been, and how I had lived in the Highlands.

Perhaps in time I will persuade her to be affectionate to me ; on my part, it will not be difficult that I should soon love her ; for she is gentle, and to regard her fills one's heart with pity. I had great terror that it might not be so.

“To-morrow, if it is possible, I think we will get away to Worthing ; I am anxious to begin my guardianship. Perhaps by a middle-day train—if I have to buy some things for my mother. Or why not there, where we shall have plenty of time ? I wish to see her away from the town—in clear, brisk air ; then we shall have the long, quiet, beautiful days to become acquainted with each other. It is so strange, is it not, a mother and daughter becoming acquainted with each other ? But, since I am her guardian, I must not let her sit up too late ; and so good-night, dear, dear papa, from your affectionate daughter,

“YOLANDE.”

That was naturally the end of the letter ; and yet she held it open before her for some time, in hesitation. And then she took her

pen and added : “ I cannot tell you how glad it would make me if you had time to write a long letter to me about Allt-nam-ba, and all the people there ; for one cannot help looking back to the place where one has been happy.”

CHAPTER III.

A BEGINNING.

DESPITE all her hurrying, however, Yolande did not manage to get away from London on the day following ; it was not until early the next morning that she and her mother and the maid found themselves finally in the train, and the great city left behind for good. The weather was brilliant and shining around them ; and the autumn-tinted woods were glorious in colour. To these, or any other passing object, Yolande, in her capacity of guardian, drew cheerful attention, treating the journey, indeed, as a very ordinary everyday affair ; but the sad-eyed mother seemed hardly capable of regarding anything but her daughter—and that sometimes with a little bit of stealthy crying.

“Ah,” she said, in those strangely hollow tones, “it is kind of you to come and let me see you for a little while.”

“A little while? What little while, then?” said Yolande, with a stare.

“Until I go back.”

“Until you go back where, mother?”

“Anywhere—away from you,” said the mother, regarding the girl with an affectionate and yet wistful look. “It was in a dream that I came away from the house with you. You seemed calling me in a dream. But now I am beginning to wake. At the station there were two ladies; I saw them looking at us; and I knew what they were thinking. They were wondering to see a beautiful young life like yours linked to a life like mine; and they were right. I could see it in their eyes.”

“They would have been better employed in minding their own business!” said Yolande, angrily.

“No; they were right,” said her mother, calmly; and then she added with a curious sort of smile: “But I am going to be with you for a little while. I am not going away yet. I want to learn all about you, and understand you; then I shall know what to think when I hear of you afterwards. You

will have a happy life ; I shall hear of you perhaps and be proud and glad ; I shall think of you always as young and happy and beautiful ; and when you go back to your friends——”

“Dear mother,” said Yolande, “I wish you would not talk nonsense. When I go back to my friends ! I am not going back to any friends until you go back with me ; do you understand that ?”

“I ?” said she ; and for a second there was a look of fright on her face. Then she shook her head sadly. “No, no. My life is wrecked and done for ; yours is all before you—without a cloud, without a shadow. As for me, I am content. I will stay with you a little while, and get to know you ; then I will go away—how could I live if I knew that I was the shadow on your life ?”

“Well, yes, mother, you have got a good deal to learn about me,” said Yolande, serenely. “It is very clear that you don’t know what a temper I have, or you would not be so anxious to provoke me to anger. But please remember that it isn’t what you want, or what you intend to do—it is what I may be

disposed to allow you to do. I have been spoiled all my life ; that is one thing you will have to learn about me. I always have my own way. You will find that out very soon ; and then you will give over making foolish plans, or thinking that it is for you to decide. Do you think I have stolen you away, and carried you into slavery, to let you do as you please ? Not at all ; it is far from that. As soon as we get to Worthing I am going to get you a prettier bonnet than that—I know the shop perfectly—I saw it the other day. But do you think I will permit you to choose the colour ? No ; not at all ! Not at all. And as for your going away, or going back, or going anywhere—oh, we will see about that, I assure you !”

For the time being, at all events, the mother did not protest. She seemed more and more fascinated by the society of her daughter ; and appeared quite absorbed in regarding the bright young fresh face, and in listening with a strange curiosity for the slight traces of a foreign accent that remained in Yolande’s talking. As for the girl herself, she bore herself in the most matter-of-fact

way. She would have no sentiment interfere. And always it was assumed that her mother was merely an invalid whom the sea air would restore to health ; not a word was said as to the cause of her present condition.

Worthing looked bright and cheerful on this breezy forenoon. The wind-swept yellow-gray sea was struck a gleaming silver here or there with floods of sunlight ; the morning promenaders had not yet gone in to lunch ; a band was playing at the end of the pier. When they got to the rooms, they found that every preparation had been made to receive them ; and in the bay-window they discovered a large telescope which the little old lady said she had borrowed from a neighbour whose rooms were unlet. Yolande managed everything—Jane being a helpless kind of creature ; and the mother submitted, occasionally with a touch of amusement appearing in her manner. But usually she was rather sad, and her eyes had an absent look in them.

“Now let me see,” said Yolande, briskly, as they sat at lunch (Jane waiting on them). “There is really so much to be done, that I

don't know where we should begin. Oh yes, I do. First we will walk along to the shops and buy your bonnet. Then to a chemist's for some scent for your dressing-bag. Then we must get glass dishes for flowers for the table—one round one for the middle, and two semicircles. Then when we come back the pony carriage must be waiting for us; and we will give you a few minutes to put on the bonnet, dear mother; and then we will go away for a drive into the country. Perhaps we shall get some wild flowers; if not, then we will buy some when we come back——”

“Why should you give yourself so much trouble, Yolande?” her mother said.

“Trouble? It is no trouble. It is an amusement—an occupation. Without an occupation how can one live?”

“Ah, you are so full of life—so full of life,” the mother said, regarding her wistfully.

“Oh, I assure you,” said Yolande, blithely, “that not many know what can be made of wild flowers in a room—if you have plenty of them. Not all mixed; but here one mass of colour; and there—another. Imagine,

now, that we were thirty-three miles from Inverness ; how could one get flowers except by going up the hillside and collecting them ? That was an occupation that had a little trouble, to be sure !—it was harder work than going to buy a bonnet ! But sometimes we were not quite dependent on the wild flowers ; there was a dear, good woman, living a few miles away—ah, she was a good friend to me—who used to send me from her garden far more than was right. And every time that I passed—another handful of flowers ; more than that, perhaps some fresh vegetables all nicely packed up ; perhaps a little basket of new-laid eggs ; perhaps a pair of ducklings—oh, such kindness as was quite ridiculous from a stranger. And then when I come away, she goes to the lodge, and takes one of the girls with her, to see that all is right ; and no question of trouble or inconvenience ; you would think it was you who were making the obligation and giving kindness, not taking it. I must write to her when I have time. But I hope soon to hear how they are all going on up there in the Highlands.”

“Dear Yolande,” said the mother, “why

should you occupy yourself about me? Do your writing; I am content to sit in the same room. Indeed, I would rather listen to you talking about the Highlands than go out to get the bonnet or anything else."

"Why do I occupy myself about you?" said Yolande. "Because I have brought you here to make you well, that is why. And you must be as much as possible out of doors—especially on such a day as this, when the air is from the sea. Ah, we shall soon make you forget the London dinginess and the smoke. And you would rather not go for a drive, perhaps, when it is I who am going to drive you?"

Indeed, she took the mastership into her own hand; and perhaps that was a fortunate necessity, for it prevented her thinking over certain things that had happened to herself. Wise, grave-eyed, thoughtful, and prudent, there was now little left in her manner of speech of the petulant and light-hearted Yolande of other days; and yet she was pleased to see that her mother was taking more and more interest in her, and perhaps sometimes—though she strove to forget the past altogether and only to keep herself busily

occupied with the present—there was some vague and subtle sense of self-approval. Or was it self-approval? Was it not rather some dim kind of belief that, if he who had appealed to her, if he who had said that he had faith in her, could now see her, he would say that she was doing well? But she tried to put these remembrances away.

An odd thing happened when they were out. They had gone to the shop where Yolande had seen the bonnets; and she was so satisfied with the one that she chose that she made her mother put it on then and there, and asked the milliner to send the other home. Then they went outside again; and not far off was a chemist's shop.

"Now," said Yolande, "we will go and choose two scents for the bottles in the dressing-bag. One shall be white rose, and the other? What other?"

"Whichever you like best, Yolande," said her mother, submissively; her daughter had become so completely her guide and guardian.

"But it is for your dressing-bag, mother, not mine," said Yolande. "You must choose. You must come into the shop and choose."

“Very well, then.”

They walked to the shop, and Yolande glanced for a minute at the window and then went inside. But the moment they had got within the door—perhaps it was the odour of the place that had recalled her to herself—the mother shrank back with a strange look of fear on her face.

“Yolande,” she said, in a low, hurried voice, “I will wait for you outside.”

“But which is to be the other scent, mother?”

“I will wait for you outside,” said she, with her hand touching her daughter’s arm. “I will wait for you outside.”

Then Yolande seemed to comprehend what that dazed look of fear meant; and she was so startled that, even after her mother had left, she could scarce summon back enough self-possession to tell the shopman what she wanted. Thereafter she never asked her mother to go near a chemist’s shop.

That same afternoon they went for a drive along some of the inland country lanes; and as they soon found that the stolid, fat, and

placid pony could safely be left under the charge of Jane, they got out whenever they had a mind, to look at an old church or to explore banks and hedgerows in search of wild flowers. Now this idle strolling, with occasional scrambling across ditches, was light enough work for one who was accustomed to climb the hills of Allt-nam-ba ; but no doubt it was fatiguing enough to this poor woman, who, nevertheless, did her very best to prove herself a cheerful companion. But it was on this fatigue that Yolande reckoned. That was why she wanted her mother to be out all day in the sea air and the country air. What she was aiming at was a certainty of sleep for this invalid of whom she was in charge. And so she cheered her on to further exertion, and pretended an eagerness in this search for wild flowers which was not very real (for ever, in the midst of it, some stray plant here or there would remind her of a herbarium far away and of other days and other scenes), until at last she thought they had both done their duty ; and so they got into the little carriage again and drove back to Worthing.

That evening at dinner she amused her mother with a long and minute account of the voyage to Egypt, and of the friends who had gone with them, and of the life on board the dahabeeah. The mother seemed peculiarly interested about Mr. Leslie, and asked many questions about him ; and Yolande told her frankly how pleasant and agreeable a young fellow he was, and how well he and his sister seemed to understand each other, and so forth. She betrayed no embarrassment in expressing her liking for him ; although, in truth, she spoke in pretty much the same terms of Colonel Graham.

“ Mr. Leslie was not married, then ? ”

“ Oh no.”

“ It was rather a dangerous situation for two young people,” the mother said, with a gentle smile. “ It is a wonder you are not wearing a ring now.”

“ What ring ? ” Yolande said, with a quick flush of colour.

“ An engagement-ring.”

In fact, the girl was not wearing her engagement-ring. On coming to London she had taken it off and put it away ; other

duties claimed her now—that was what she said to herself. And now she was content that her mother should remain in ignorance of that portion of her past story.

“I have other things to attend to,” she said, briefly; and the subject was not continued.

That day passed very successfully. The mother had shown not the slightest symptom of any craving for either stimulant or narcotic; nor any growing depression in consequence of being deprived of these—though Jack Melville had warned Yolande that both were probable. No; the languor from which she suffered appeared to be merely the languor of ill-health; and, so far from becoming more depressed, she had become rather more cheerful—especially when they were wandering along the lanes in search of wild flowers. Moreover, when she went to bed (she and Yolande occupied a large double-bedded room) she very speedily fell into a sound, quiet sleep. Yolande lay awake, watching her; but everything seemed right; and so by and by the girl’s mind began to wander away to distant scenes and to pictures that

she had been trying to banish from her eyes.

And if sometimes in this hushed room she cried silently to herself, and hid her face in the pillow so that no sob should awaken the sleeping mother? Well, perhaps that was only a natural reaction. The strain of all that forced cheerfulness had been terrible. Once or twice during the evening she had had to speak of the Highlands; and the effort on such occasions to shut out certain recollections and vain regrets and self-abasements was of itself a hard thing. And now that the strain was over, her imagination ran riot; all the old life up there, with its wonder and delight and its unknown pitfalls, came back to her; and all through it she seemed to hear a sad refrain—a couple of lines from one of Mrs. Bell's ballads—that she could not get out of her head.

*“Quoth he, ‘My bonnie leddy, were ye sweet Jeanie Graham!’
‘Indeed, guid Sir, but ye’ve guessed my very name.’”*

They could not apply to her; but somehow there was sorrow in them; and a meeting after many years; and the tragedy of two changed lives. How could they apply to

her? If there was any one of whom she was thinking it ought to have been he to whom she had plighted her troth. She had put aside her engagement-ring for a season; but she was not thereby absolved from her promise. And yet it was not of him that she was thinking—it was of some one she saw only vaguely—but gray-haired and after many years—coming back to a wrecked existence—and her heart, that had a great yearning and pity and love in it, knew that it could not help—and what was there but a woman's tears and a life-long regret? That was a sad night. It was not the mother, it was the daughter, who passed the long sleepless hours in suffering. But with the morning Yolande had pulled herself together again. She was only a little pale—that was all. She was as cheerful, as brave, as high-spirited as ever. When did the band play?—they would walk out on the pier. But even Jane could see that this was not the Yolande who had lived at Allt-nam-ba—with a kind of sunlight always on her face; and she wondered.

Not that day but the next came the anxiously expected news from the Highlands.

“MY DARLING YOLANDE—Your letter has given me inexpressible relief. I was so loth to see you go. Above all, it seemed so cruel that you should go alone, and I remain here. But probably Mr. Melville was right ; perhaps it may all turn out for the best ; but it will be a long time before any one can say so ; and as I think of you in the meantime, it is with no great sense of satisfaction that I am conscious that I can do nothing to help you. But I rejoice that so far you have had no serious trouble ; perhaps the worst is over ; if that *were* so, then there might be a recompense to you for what you must be undergoing. It would be strange, indeed, if this should succeed after so many failures. It would make a great difference to all our lives ; sometimes I begin to think it possible, and then recollections of the past prove too strong. Let me know your opinion. Tell me everything. Even after all these years, sometimes I begin to hope, and to think of our having a home and a household after all.

“There is but little news to send you. At the moment I am quite alone. Mr. Shortlands has changed all his plans, and has gone

south for a few days, finding that he can come back and remain with me until the 15th of October. Then you must tell me what you would have me do. Perhaps you will know better by that time. If you think the experiment hopeless, I trust you will have the honesty to say so ; then I will take you for a run abroad somewhere, after your long waiting and nursing.

“The Master is in Inverness, I hear ; probably it is business that detains him ; otherwise I should have been glad of his company on the hill, now that Shortlands is away. But the shooting has lost all interest for me ; when I come back in the evening there is no one standing at the door, and no one to sit at the head of the dinner-table. I shall be glad when the 15th of October comes ; and then, if there is no prospect of your present undertaking proving successful, you and I will preen our feathers for the South. If they are going to bury you alive in these wilds subsequently, you and I must have at least one last swallow-flight. Not the Riviera this time ; the Riviera is getting to be a combination of Bond Street and Piccadilly. Athens—

what do you say? I remember the Grahams talking vaguely about their perhaps trying to spend a winter in Algiers: and pleasanter travelling companions you could not find anywhere; but even if we have to go alone, we shall not grumble much?

“This reminds me that one part of your letter made me very angry—I mean about the expense of the dressing-bag, and your proposed economy at Worthing. I suppose it was those people at the Château that put those ideas into your head; but I wish you to understand that there is nothing so stupid as unnecessary economy for economy’s sake; and that when I wish you to begin cheese-paring I will tell you so. Extravagance is silly—and ill-bred, too; but there is some such thing as knowing what one can fairly spend in proportion to one’s income; and when I wish you to be more moderate in your expenditure I will tell you. And, indeed, it is not at such a time that you should think of expense at all. If this experiment is likely to end as we wish—then we shall not be considering a few pounds or so.

“I think you will be pleased to hear that

Mrs. Bell does not manage one whit better than you—how could she, when everything was perfect? But the situation is awkward. I imagined she was only coming here for a day or two—to set things going, as it were, under a new *régime*; but the good woman shows no signs of departure; and, indeed, she manages everything with such tact and good sense, and with such an honest, frank recognition of the facts of the case, that I am really afraid to hurt her and offend her by suggesting that she should not waste so much of her time up here. It was all very well with Mr. Melville—he was her hero, the master of the house, the representative of the family that she looked up to; but it is different with me; and yet there is a kind of self-respect in the way in which she strictly keeps to her ‘station,’ that one does not like to interfere. I have thought of pointing out to her that my last housekeeper was a person called Yolande Winterbourne, and that she was in no wise so respectful in her manner; but then I thought it better to let the good woman have her own way; and with all her respectfulness there is, as you know, a frank and honest

friendliness which tells you that she quite understands her own value in the world. She has, however, been so communicative as to unfold to me her great project of the buying back of Monaglen; and I must say it seems very ill-advised of Mr. Melville, just when this project is about to be accomplished, to disappear and leave not even his address behind. All that Mrs. Bell knows is that, on the morning you left, he announced his intention of crossing over the hills to Kingussie, to catch the night-train going south; and Duncan says he saw him going up by the Corrie-an-Eich. You know what an undertaking that is, and the stories they tell about people having been lost in these solitudes; but, as Duncan says, there was not any one in the country who could cross the hills with less chance of coming to harm than Mr. Melville. Still, he might have left the good woman his address; and she, it seems, did not consider it her 'place' to ask."

At this point Yolande stopped—her brain bewildered, her heart beating wildly. If he had crossed over the hills to catch the night-

train to the south—why, that was the train in which she also was travelling from Inverness to London! Had he been in that same train, then—separated from her by a few carriages only—during the long darkness in which she seemed to be leaving behind her youth, and hope, and almost the common desire of life? And why? He had spoken to no one of his going away. Mrs. Bell had guessed that he might be going, from his preparations of the previous evening; but to leave on that very morning—to catch the very train in which she was seated—perhaps to come all the way to London with her; here was food for speculation and wonder! Of course, it never occurred to her that he might have come to any harm in crossing the hills; she did not even think of that. He was as familiar with these corries and slopes and streams as with the door-step of the house at Gress. No; he had waited for the train to come along; perhaps she did not even look out from the window when they reached the station; he would get into one of the carriages; and all through the long afternoon and evening, and on and through the blackness of the night, and in the gray of

the morning, he was there. And perhaps at Euston Square, too? He might easily escape her notice in the crowd, if he wished to do so. Would he disappear into the wilderness of London? But he knew the name of the hotel she was going to—that had all been arranged between them; might he not by accident have passed along Albemarle Street on one or other of those days? Ah, if she had chanced to see him!—would not London have seemed less lonely—would she not have consoled herself with the fancy that somewhere or other there was one watching over her and guarding her? A dream—a dream. If he were indeed there, he had avoided meeting her. He had gone away. He had disappeared—into the unknown; and perhaps the next she should hear of him might be after many years, as of a gray-haired man going back to the place that once knew him, with perhaps some vague question on his lips: “*My bonny leddy, were ye sweet Jeanie Graham?*”—though to whom he might address that question she scarcely dared to ask or think.

She only looked over the remainder of the

letter ; her hurried fancies were wandering far away.

“ So you see I have no news ; although in my solitude this gossip seems to unite you with me for a time. The only extraordinary thing that I have seen or met with since you left me ran across the other night on coming home from the shooting. We had been to the far tops after ptarmigan and white hares, and got belated. Long before we reached home complete darkness overtook us ; a darkness so complete that, although we walked Indian file, Duncan leading, I could not see Shortlands, who was just in front of me ; I had to follow him by sound, sliding down among loose stones or jumping into peat-hags in a very happy-go-lucky fashion. Crossing the Allt Crôm by the little swinging bridge you know of was also a pleasant performance ; for there had been rain, and the waters were much swollen, and made a terrible noise in the dark. However, it was when we were over the bridge and making for the lodge that I noticed the phenomenon I am going to tell you about. I was trying to

make out John Shortlands' legs in front of me when I saw on the ground two or three small points of white fire. I thought it strange for glow-worms to be so high above the level of the sea ; and I called the others back to examine these things. But now I found, as they were all standing in the dark, talking, that wherever you lifted your foot from the wet black peat, immediately afterwards a large number of these pale points of clear fire appeared, burning for about a minute and then gradually disappearing. Some were larger and clearer than others—just as you remember, on a phosphorescent night at sea, there are individual big stars separate from the general rush of white as the steamer goes on. We tried to lift some of the points of light, but could not manage it ; so I take it they were not glow-worms or any other living creatures, but an emanation of gas from the peaty soil ; only that, unlike the will-o'-the-wisp, they were quite stationary and burned with a clear white, or blue-white flame—the size of the most of them not bigger than the head of a common pin, and sometimes about fifteen or twenty of them appear-

ing where one foot had been pressed into the soft soil. Had Mr. Melville been at Gress I should have asked him about it ; no doubt he has noticed this thing in his rambles ; but he has been away, as I say, and nobody about here has any explanation to offer. The shepherds say that the appearance of this phosphorescence, or electricity, or illuminated gas, or whatever it is, foretells a change in the weather ; but I have never yet met with anything in heaven or earth of which the shepherds did not say the same thing. But as you, my dear Yolande, have not seen this phenomenon, and know absolutely nothing about it, you will be in a position to furnish me with a perfectly consistent scientific theory about it, which I desire to have from you at your convenience.

“A hamper of game goes to you to-day—also a bunch of white heather from your affectionate father,

“R. G. WINTERBOURNE.”

She dwelt over the picture here presented of his solitary life in the north ; and she knew that now no longer were there happy dinner-

parties in the evening, and pleasant friends talking together; and no longer was there any need for Duncan—outside in the twilight—to play *Melville's Welcome Home*.

CHAPTER IV.

AWAKING.

ANOTHER two days passed, Yolande doing her best to make the time go by briskly and pleasantly. They walked on the promenade or the pier; they drove away inland, through quaint little villages and quiet lanes; when the weather was wet they stayed indoors, and she read to her mother; or they rigged up the big telescope in the bay-window, to follow the slow progress of the distant ships. And the strange thing was that, as Yolande gradually perceived, her mother's intellect seemed to grow clearer and clearer while her spirits grew more depressed.

"I have been in a dream—I have been in a dream," she used to say. "I will try not to go back. Yolande, you must help me. You must give me your hand."

"You have been ill, mother; the sea air

will make you strong again," the girl said, making no reference to other matters.

However, that studied silence did not last. On the evening of the fifth day of their stay at Worthing, Yolande observed that her mother seemed still more depressed and almost suffering; and she did all she could to distract her attention and amuse her. At last the poor woman said, looking at her daughter in a curious kind of way—

"Yolande, did you notice, when I came away from the house with you, that I went back for a moment into my room?"

"Yes, I remember you did?"

"I will tell you now why I went back."

She put her hand in her pocket and drew out a small blue bottle, which she put on the table.

"It was for that," she said, calmly.

A flush of colour overspread the hitherto pale features of the girl; it was she who was ashamed and embarrassed; and she said quickly—

"Yes, I understand, mother—I know what it is—but now you will put it away—you do not want it any longer——"

“I am afraid,” the mother said, in a low voice. “Sometimes I have tried, until it seemed as if I was dying; and that has brought me to life again. Oh, I hope I shall never touch it again—I want to be with you, walking by your side among the other people—and like them—like every one else——”

“And so you shall, mother,” Yolande said; and she rose and got hold of the bottle. “I am going to throw this away.”

“No, no, Yolande, give it to me,” she said, but without any excitement. “It is no use throwing it away. That would make me think of it. I would get more. I could not rest until I had gone to a chemist’s and got more—perhaps some time when you were not looking. But when it is there, I feel safe. I can push it away from me.”

“Very well, then,” said Yolande, and she went to the fireplace, and placed the bottle conspicuously on the mantel-shelf. Then she went back to her mother. “It shall remain there, mother—as something you have no further need of. That is done with now. It was a great temptation when you were living

in lodgings in a town, not in good air; and you were very weak and ill; but soon you will be strong enough to get over your fits of faintness or depression without *that*." She put her hand on her mother's shoulder. "It is for my sake that you have put it away?"

In answer she took her daughter's hand in both hers, and covered it with kisses.

"Yes, yes, yes! I have put it away, Yolande, for your sake. I have put it away for ever now. But you have a little excuse for me? You do not think so hardly of me as the others? I have been near dying—and alone. I did not know I had such a beautiful daughter—coming to take care of me, too! And I don't want you to go away now—not for a while at least. Stay with me for a little time—until—until I have got to be just like the people we meet out walking—just like every one else—and then I shall have no fear of being alone—I shall never, never touch *that*."

She glanced at the bottle on the mantel-shelf with a sort of horror. She held her daughter's hand tight. And Yolande kept by her until, not thinking it was prudent to

make too much of this little incident, she begged her mother to come and get her things on for another short stroll before tea.

Towards the evening, however, it was clear that this poor woman was suffering more and more, although she endeavoured to put a brave face on it, and only desired that Yolande should be in the room with her. At dinner, she took next to nothing; and Yolande, on her own responsibility, begged to be allowed to send for some wine for her. But no. She seemed to think that there was something to be got through, and she would go through with it. Sometimes she went to the window and looked out—listening to the sound of the sea in the darkness. Then she would come back and sit down by the fire, and ask Yolande to read to her—this, that, or the other thing. But what she most liked to have read and re-read to her was “A Dream of Fair Women;” and she liked to have Yolande standing by the fireplace, so that she could regard her. And sometimes the tears would gather in her eyes, when the girl came to the lines about Jephtha’s daughter :

“——emptied of all joy,
Leaving the dance and song.

Leaving the olive-gardens far below,
Leaving the promise of my bridal bower,
The valleys of grape-loaded vines that glow
Beneath the battled tower.

The light white cloud swam over us. Anon
We heard the lion roaring from his den ;
We saw the large white stars rise one by one,
Or, from the darkened glen,

Saw God divide the night with flying flame,
And thunder on the everlasting hills.
I heard Him, for He spake, and grief became
A solemn scorn of ills.”

“It was not fair—it was not fair,” she murmured.

“What, mother?”

“To send you here.”

“Where ought I to be, then,” she asked, proudly, “except by your side?”

“You? Your young life should not be sacrificed to mine. Why did they ask you? I should thank God, Yolande, if you were to go away this evening—now—if you were to go away, and be happy, with your youth, and beauty, and kind friends—that is the life fit for you——”

“But I am not going, mother.”

“Ah, you don’t know—you don’t know,” the other said, with a kind of despair coming over her. “I am ill, Yolande. I am wretched and miserable——”

“The more reason I should stay, surely!”

“I wish you would go away and leave me. I can get back to London. What I have been thinking of is beyond me. I am too ill. But you—you—I shall always think of you as moving through the world like a princess—in sunlight——”

“Dear mother,” said Yolande, firmly, “I think we said we were going to have no more nonsense. I am not going to leave you. And what you were looking forward to is quite impossible. If you are ill and suffering now, I am sorry—I would gladly bear it for your sake. I have had little trouble in the world; I would take your share. But going away from you I am not. So you must take courage, and hope; and some day—ah, some day soon you will be glad.”

“But if I am restless to-night,” said she, glancing at her daughter uneasily, “and walking up and down, it will disturb you.”

“What does it matter?” said Yolande, cheerfully.

“You might get another room?”

“I am not going into any other room—do you think I will forsake my patient?”

“Will you leave the light burning, then?”

“If you wish it—yes; but not high, for you must sleep.”

But when they were retiring to rest the mother begged that the little blue bottle should be placed on the bedroom chimney-piece; and the girl hesitated.

“Why, mother, why? You surely would not touch it!”

“Oh, I hope not! I hope not! But I shall know it is near—if I am like to die!”

“You must not fear that, mother. I will put the bottle on the chimneypiece, if you like; but you need not even think of it. That is more likely to cause your death than anything else. And you would not break your promise to me?”

She pressed her daughter’s hand—that was all.

Yolande did not go quickly to sleep; for she knew that her mother was suffering—the

laboured sighs from time to time told her as much. She lay and listened to the wash of the sea along the shingle, and to the tramp of the last wayfarers along the pavement. She heard the people of the house go upstairs to bed. And then, by and by, the stillness of the room, and the effects of the fresh air, and the natural healthiness of youth, combined to make her drowsy, and, rather against her inclination, her eyes slowly closed.

She was woke by a moan—as of a soul in mortal agony. But even in her alarm she did not start up; she took time to recover her senses. And if the poor mother were really in such suffering, would it not be better for her to lie as if she were asleep? No appeal could be made to her for any relaxation of the promise that had been given her.

Then she became aware of a stealthy noise; and a strange terror took possession of her. She opened her eyes ever so slightly—glimmering through the lashes only—and there she saw that her worst fears were being realised. Her mother had got out of bed and stolen across the room to the sideboard in the parlour, returning with a glass.

Yolande, all trembling, lay and watched. She was not going to interfere—it was not part of her plan; and you may be sure she had contemplated this possibility before now. And very soon it appeared why the poor woman had taken the trouble to go for a glass; it was to measure out the smallest quantity that she thought would alleviate her anguish. She poured a certain quantity of the black-looking fluid into the glass; then she regarded it, as if with hesitation; then she deliberately poured back one drop, two drops, three drops; and drank the rest at a gulp. Then, in the same stealthy fashion, she took the glass to the parlour and left it there; and crept silently back again and into bed.

Yolande rose. Her face was pale; her lips firm. She did not look at her mother; but, just as if she were assuming her to be asleep, she quietly went out of the room and presently returned with a glass in her hand. She went to the chimneypiece. Very well she knew that her mother's eyes were fixed on her, and intently watching her; and, as she poured some of that dark fluid into the

glass, no doubt she guessed the poor woman was imagining that this was an experiment to see what had been taken out of the bottle. But that was not quite Yolande's purpose. When she had poured out, as nearly as she could calculate, the same quantity that her mother had taken, she turned her face to the light, and deliberately drank the contents of the glass. It was done in a second; there was a sweet, mawkish, pungent taste in the mouth, and a shiver of disgust as she swallowed the thing; then she calmly replaced the bottle on the chimneypiece.

But the mother had sprung from her bed with a wild shriek, and caught the girl by both hands.

"Yolande, Yolande, what have you done!"

"What is right for you, mother, is right for me," she said, in clear and settled tones. "It is how I mean to do always!"

The frantic grief of this poor creature was pitiable to witness. She flung her arms round her daughter, and drew her to her, and wept aloud, and called down vengeance upon herself from Heaven. And then, in a passion of remorse, she flew at the bottle that

was standing there, and would have hurled it into the fireplace, had not Yolande (whose head was beginning to swim already) interposed, calmly and firmly. She took the bottle from her mother's hand, and replaced it.

"No ; it must remain there, mother. It must stand there until you and I can bear to know that it is there, and not to wish for it."

Even in the midst of her wild distress and remorse there was one phrase in this speech that had the effect of silencing the mother altogether. She drew back, aghast ; her face white ; her eyes staring with horror.

"You and I ?" she repeated. "You and I ? You—to become like—like——"

"Yes," said Yolande. "What is right for you is right for me ; that is what I mean to do—*always*. Now, dear mother," she added, in a more languid way, "I will lie down—I am giddy——"

She sat down on the edge of the bed, putting her hand to her forehead, and rested so awhile ; then insensibly after a time she drooped down on to the pillow—although the frightened and frantic mother tried to get an

arm round her waist ; and very soon the girl had relapsed into perfect insensibility.

And then a cry rang through the house like the cry of the Egyptian mothers over the death of their first-born. The poison seemed to act in directly opposite ways in the brains of these two women—the one it plunged into a profound stupor ; the other it drove into frenzy. She threw herself on the senseless form, and wound her arms round the girl, and shrieked aloud that she had murdered her child—her beautiful daughter—she was dying—dead—and no one to save her—murdered by her own mother ! The little household was roused at once. Jane came rushing in, terrified. The landlady was the first to recover her wits, and instantly she sent a housemaid for a doctor. Jane, being a strong-armed woman, dragged the hysterical mother back from the bed, and bathed her young mistress's forehead with eau-de-cologne—it was all the poor kind creature could think of. Then they tried to calm the mother somewhat ; for she was begging them to give her a knife, that she might kill herself and die with her child.

The doctor's arrival quieted matters some-

what ; and he had scarcely been a minute in the room when his eyes fell on the small blue bottle on the mantelpiece. That he instantly got hold of ; the label told him what were the contents ; and when he went back to the bedside of the girl—who was lying insensible, in a heavy-breathing sleep, her chest labouring as if against some weight—he had to exercise some control over the mother to get her to show him precisely the quantity of the fluid that had been taken. The poor woman seemed beside herself. She dropped on her knees before him in a passion of tears, and clasped her hands.

“Save her—save her!—save my child to me!—if you can give her back to me I will die a hundred times before harm shall come to her—my beautiful child, that came to me like an angel, with kindness, and open hands—and this is what I have done!”

“Hush, hush,” said the doctor, and he took her by the hand, and gently raised her. “Now you must be quiet. I am not going to wake your daughter. If that is what she took, she will sleep it off ; she is young, and I should say healthy. I am going to let

nature work the cure ; though I fear the young lady will have a bad headache in the morning. It is a most mischievous thing to have such drugs in the house. You are her maid, I understand?" he said, turning to Jane.

"Yes, sir."

"Ah. Well, I think for to-night you had better occupy that other bed there ; and the young lady's mother can have a bed elsewhere. I don't think you need fear anything—except a headache in the morning. Let her sleep as long as she may. In the morning let her go for a drive in the fresh air, if she is too languid to walk."

But the mother cried so bitterly on hearing of this arrangement that they had to consent to her retaining her place in the room, while Jane said she could make herself comfortable enough in an arm-chair. As for the poor mother, she did not go back to her own bed at all ; she sat at the side of Yolande's bed—at the foot of it, lest the sound of her sobbing should disturb the sleeper ; and sometimes she put her hand ever so lightly on the bed-clothes, with a kind of pat, as it were, while the tears were running down her face.

CHAPTER V.

“O’ BYGANE DAYS AND ME.”

THE Master of Lynn was walking along Church Street, Inverness, leisurely smoking his morning cigar, when a small boy from the hotel overtook him, and handed him a letter. He glanced at the handwriting, and saw it was from his sister; so he put it in his pocket without opening it. Then he went on and into Mr. Macleay’s shop.

This was a favourite lounge of his. For not only was it a valuable museum of natural history—all kinds of curiosities and rarities being sent thither to be preserved—but also, to any one with sufficient knowledge, it afforded a very fair report as to what was going on in the different forests. More than that, it was possible for one to form a shrewd guess as to the character of some of the people then wandering about the Highlands,—the sort of sportsmen, for example, who sent

to be stuffed such rare and remarkable birds as gannets, kittiwakes, and skarts, or who wished to have all the honours of a glass-case and a painted background conferred on a three-pound trout. It was not difficult (as he sat on the counter or strolled about) to imagine the simple joy with which these trophies had been secured and carefully packed and sent away for preservation; while, on the other hand, some great stag's head—a magnificent and solitary prize—perhaps awoke a touch of envy. The good-natured proprietor of the establishment, busy with his own affairs, let this young man do pretty much what he liked in the place; and so it was that the Master, having had a look at the latest specimens of the skill of the workshop, took out his sister's letter and read it, and then begged for a sheet of paper and the loan of a pen. He thought he might just as well finish his cigar here, and answer his sister at the same time.

He wrote as follows:—

“Inverness, September 29.

“DEAR POLLY—I wish you would be pleased

to moderate the rancour of your tongue; there is quite enough of that commodity at Lynn. Whoever has told you of the latest row has probably not overstepped the truth; but isn't it a blessed dispensation of Providence that one can obtain a little peace at the Station Hotel? However, that is becoming slow. I wish I knew where Jack Melville is; I would propose a little foreign travel. For one thing, I certainly don't mean to go back to Lynn until Mr. Winterbourne has left Alltnam-ba; of course, he must see very well that the people at the Towers have cut him; and no doubt he understands the reason; and he might ask, don't you see; and very likely he might get angry and indignant (I shouldn't blame him), and then he might ask Yolande to break off the engagement. Such things have happened before. But you needn't get wild with *me*. I don't seek to break off the engagement; certainly not; if that is what they are aiming at they will find me just as pertinacious as you were about Graham (you needn't assume that you have all the obstinacy in the world); and although I'm not too squeamish about most things, still,

I'm not going to break my word simply because Auntie Tab doesn't like Mr. Winterbourne's politics.

“ Now there's a chance for you, Miss Polly. Why don't you set to work to make the leopard change his spots? You think you can talk anybody over. Why don't you talk over Mr. Winterbourne into the paths of virtue and high Toryism? I don't see why it should be so difficult. Of course he's violent enough in the House; but that's to keep in with his constituents; and to talk with him after a day's shooting you wouldn't guess he had any politics at all. I'd bet a sovereign he would rather get a royal than be made a Cabinet Minister. You'd much better go and coax him into the paths of the just than keep getting into rages with me. You talk as if it was you that wanted to marry Yolande; or rather, as if it was you who were going to buy the Corrievreak side from Sir John, and couldn't wait for the conveyancing to be done. Such impetuosity isn't in accord with your advancing years. The fact is, you haven't been having your fair dose of flirtation lately, and you're in a

bad temper. But why with me? I didn't ask the people to Inverstroy. I can see what sort of people they are by the cart-load of heads Graham has sent here (I am writing in Macleay's shop). If ever I can afford to keep our forest in my own hands there won't be anything of that kind going on—no matter who is in the house.

"And why should you call upon me for the explanation of the 'mystery'? What mystery is involved in Yolande's going south? Her father, I understand, leaves on the 15th of October; and I am not surprised that nothing has been said about a lease of the place. Of course, Winterbourne must understand. But in the south, my dear Polly, if you would only look at the reasonable aspect of affairs, we may all of us meet on less embarrassing terms; and I for one shall not be sorry to get away for the winter from the society of Tabby and Co. Yolande and I have not quarrelled in the least; on that point you may keep your hair smooth. But I am not at all sure that I am not bound in honour to tell her how I am placed; and what treatment in the future—or rather what

no-treatment—she may expect from my affectionate relatives. Of course it cannot matter to her. She will be independent of them—I also. But I think I ought to let her know ; so that she will not be surprised at their silence ; and of course if she resents their attitude to her father (as is very likely)—well, that is their fault, not mine. I am not going to argue any more about it ; and as for anything like begging for their patronage or sufferance of Yolande, that is entirely out of the question. *I will not have it ;* and I have told you so before ; so there may just as well be an end to your lecturing. I am a vertebrate animal.

“Yolande is at Worthing—not in London, as you seem to think. I don’t know her address ; but I have written to Allt-nam-ba for it—I believe she left rather in a hurry. No ; I shan’t send it to you ; for you would probably only make mischief by interfering ; and indeed it is not with her that any persuasion is necessary. Persuasion?—it’s a little common sense that is necessary ! But that kind of plant doesn’t flourish at the Towers—I never heard of Jack Mel-

ville getting it for his collection of dried weeds.

"Well, good-bye. Don't tear your hair.
—Your affectionate brother,

ARCHIE."

"P.S.—It is very kind of you to remind me of Baby's birthday ; but how on earth do you expect me to know what to send it ? A rocking-horse, or a Latin Grammar, or what ?"

He leisurely folded the letter, put it in an envelope, and addressed it ; then he turned to have a further chat with Mr. Macleay about the various triumphs of the taxidermic art standing around. Several of these were in the window ; and he was idly regarding them when he caught sight—through the panes—of some one passing by outside. For a second he seemed to pause, irresolute ; then he quickly said good-morning to Mr. Macleay, went outside, threw away his cigar, and followed the figure that he had seen passing the window. It was that of a young woman, neatly dressed ; indeed, it was no other than Shena Vân—though probably

Janet Stewart had acquired that name when she was younger, for now she could not strictly be described as fair, though her hair was of a light brown and her eyes of a deep and exceedingly pretty blue.

“Good-morning, Miss Stewart,” said he, overtaking her.

The young lady turned quickly, perhaps, with a slight touch of alarm as well as of surprise in her look.

“Oh, good-morning, Mr. Leslie,” said she, with a certain reserve—not to say coldness—of manner ; though the sound of her speech, with its slight accent, was naturally gentle and winning.

“I had no idea you were in Inverness,” said he. “I just caught a glimpse of you while I was in Macleay’s shop. Why, it is a long time since I have seen you now.”

She was a little embarrassed and nervous ; probably desirous of getting away, and yet not wishing to be rude.

“I am often in Inverness, now,” she said, with her eyes averted, “since my sister was married.”

“Are you going to the steamer?” he

asked, for she carried a small parcel in her hand.

"Yes," said she, with some hesitation. "I—I was thinking of walking to the steamer."

"Then I suppose I may go as far with you," said he, "for I have a letter that I want the clerk to have sent on to Inverstroy."

She glanced quickly up and down the street; but he did not give her time to say yea or nay; and then with something of silence and resentment on her part, they set out together. It was a very pleasant and cheerful morning; and their way was out into the country; for Miss Stewart's destination was that lock on the Caledonian Canal from which the steamer daily sails for the south. Nevertheless the young lady did not seem over well pleased.

At first they talked chiefly about her friends and relatives—he asking the questions and she answering with somewhat few words; and she was careful to inform him that now she was more than ever likely to be away from Inverness-shire, for her brother had recently been elected to one of the professorships at Aberdeen, and he had taken a house

there, and he liked to have her in the house, because of looking after things. She gave him to understand that there was a good deal of society in the ancient city of Aberdeen; and that the young men of the University were anxious to visit at her brother's house.

"It is a natural thing," said pretty Shena Vân, with a touch of pride in her tone, "for the young men to be glad to be friends with my brother; not only because he is one of the professors, but because he was very distinguished at Edinburgh, and at Heidelberg too—very distinguished indeed."

"Oh yes; I know that," said the Master of Lynn, warmly. "I have heard Jack Melville speak of him. I daresay your father is very proud of his success."

"Indeed, I think we are all rather proud of it," said Miss Stewart.

But when they had crossed the bridge over the wide and shallow waters of the Ness, and were getting away from the town into the quietude of the country, he endeavoured to win over his companion to something more of friendliness. He was a gentle-spoken youth; and this coldness on

the part of his ancient comrade he seemed to consider unfair.

"We used to be great friends," said he, "but I suppose you have forgotten all that. I suppose you have forgotten the time when Shena Vân was reaching out for the branch of a rowan-tree and fell into the burn?"

She blushed deeply; but there was the same cold reserve in her manner as she said—

"That was a long time ago."

"Sometimes," said he, with a sort of gentleness in his look, "I wish your father had never gone away to Strathaylort; you and I used to be great friends at one time."

"My father is very well pleased with Strathaylort," said Miss Stewart, "and so are we all; for the manse is larger; and we have many more friends in Strathaylort. And the friends we left—well, I suppose, they can remember us when they wish to remember us."

This was rather pointed; but he took no notice of it—he was so anxious to win his companion over to a more conciliatory mood.

“And are you as fond of reading poetry as ever?” said he, regarding her—but always her eyes were averted.

“Sometimes I read poetry as I read other things,” she said, “but with my sister in Inverness and my brother in Aberdeen, I am very often on visits now.”

“Do you remember how you used to read ‘Horatius’ aloud—on the hill above Corrie-an-Eich? And the bridge below was the bridge that the brave Horatius kept; and you seemed to see him jump into the Allt Crôm, not the Tiber at all; and I am quite sure when you held out your finger and pointed when

‘he saw on Palatinus

’The white porch of his home’

—you were looking at the zinc-roofed coach-house at Allt-nam-ba.”

“I was very silly then,” said Shena Vân, with red cheeks.

“And when you were Boadicea, a flock of sheep did very well as an army for you to address; only the collies used to think you were mad.”

“I daresay they were right.”

"Do you remember the Sword Chant of Thorstein Raudi, and my bringing you a halberd from the Towers? 'Might Giver! I kiss thee'—'Joy Giver! I kiss thee'—'Fame Giver! I kiss thee'?"

"Indeed you have a wonderful recollection," said Miss Stewart. "I should think it was time to forget such folly. As one grows up there are more serious things to attend to. I am told"—and here, for the first time, she turned her beautiful dark blue eyes to him, but not her face; so that she was looking at him rather askance, and in a curious, interrogative, and at the same time half-combative fashion—"I am told that you are about to be married."

Now it was his turn to be embarrassed; and he did not meet those too searching eyes.

"As you say, Shena, life turns out to have serious duties, and not to be quite like what one dreams about when one is young," he observed, somewhat vaguely. "That can't prevent your remembering other days with a good deal of affection——"

"But you must let me congratulate you,

Mr. Leslie," said she, sharply bringing him to his senses. "And if the wedding is to be at Lynn, I am sure my father would be glad to come over from Strathaylort."

There could be nothing further said on this rather awkward subject just at the moment, for they had arrived at the steamer, and he had to go and hunt out the clerk to intrust him with those small commissions. Then he rejoined Miss Stewart, and set out for the town again ; but, while she was quite civil and friendly in a formal fashion, he could not draw her into any sort of conjoint regarding of their youthful and sentimental days. Nay, more ; when they got back to the bridge, she intimated, in the gentlest and most respectful way, that she would rather go through the town alone ; and so he was forced to surrender the cruel solace of her companionship.

"Good-bye, Shena !" said he, and he held her hand for a moment.

"Good-morning, Mr. Leslie," said she, without turning her eyes towards him.

Then he walked away by the side of the river, with a general sense of being aggrieved

settling down on him. Whichever way he turned, people seemed only disposed to thwart and controvert him. Surely there was no harm in being on friendly terms with Shena Vân, and in reminding her of the days when he and she were boy and girl together? If he had jilted her, she would have good grounds for being vexed and angry; but he had not. Nothing in that direction had ever been spoken of between them. It is true he had at one time been very much in love with her; and although he had but little romance in his character (that being an ingredient not likely to be fostered by the air of Oxford, or by the society of the young officers of the Seaforth Highlanders), still the glamour of love had for the moment blinded him, and he had seriously contemplated asking her to be his wife. He had argued with himself that this was no stage-case of a noble lord wedding a village maiden; but the son of an almost penniless peer marrying a well-accomplished young lady of perfectly respectable parentage, a young lady whose beautiful qualities of mind were known only to a few—only to one, perhaps, who had discovered them by looking

into the magic mirror of a pair of strangely dark and clear blue eyes. The infatuation was strong—for a time; but when pretty Mrs. Graham came to learn of it, there was trouble. Now the Master of Lynn detested trouble. Besides, his sister's arguments in this case were terribly cogent. She granted that Shena Vên might be everything he said, and quite entitled, by her intelligence and virtues and amiabilities of character, to become the future mistress of Lynn Towers. But she had not a penny. And was all the labour that had been bestowed on freeing the estate from its burdens to be thrown away? Were the Leslies to remain in those pinched circumstances that prevented their taking their proper place in the country, to say nothing of London? Mrs. Graham begged and implored; there was some distant and awful thunder on the part of his lordship; and then Archie Leslie (who hated fuss) began to withdraw himself from the fatal magnetism of those dark blue eyes. Nothing had been said; Miss Stewart could not complain. But the beautiful blue eyes had a measure of shrewdness in them; she may

have guessed; nay, more—she may have hoped, and even cherished her own little romantic dreams of affection. Be that as it may, the young Master of Lynn gave way to those entreaties, to that warning of storm. When his sister said he was going to make a fool of himself, he got angry; but at the same time he saw as clearly as she that Lynn was starved for want of money. And although love's young dream might never return in all its freshness of wonder and longing, still there were a large number of pretty and handsome young women in this country, some one of whom (if her eyes had not quite the depth and clearness of the eyes of Shena Vân) might look very well at the head of the dinner-table at Lynn Towers. And so for a time he left Lynn, and went away to Edinburgh; and if his disappointment and isolation did drive him into composing a little song with the refrain,

*“O Shena, Shena, my heart is true
To you where'er you go”*

—that was only the last up-flickering flame from the dust and ashes of the extinguished romance; and the Master of Lynn had done

everything that was required of him, and had a fair right to expect that his relatives would remember that in the future.

And now it can be well understood how, as he walked alone along the shores of the wide river, he should feel that he had been ill-treated. Not even Janet Stewart's friendship was left to him. He had looked once more into those blue eyes; and he could remember them shining with laughter or dilated with an awful majesty, as Boadicea addressed an army of sheep, or perhaps softening a little in farewell when he was going away to Oxford; but now there was nothing but coldness. She did not care to recall the old days. And, indeed, as he walked on and out into the country, some other verses that he had learned from Shena Vîn in those bygone days began to come into his head; and he grew in a way to compassionate himself, and to think of himself in future years as looking back upon his youth with a strange and pathetic regret—mingled with some other feelings.

*“ Oh, mind ye, love, how oft we left
The dearin, dinsome town,*

*To wander by the green burn-side
And hear its water croon ?
The simmer leaves hung ower our heads,
The flowers burst round our feet,
And in the gloamin' o' the wood
The throssil whistled sweet.*

* * * *

*Oh dear, dear Jeanie Morrison,
Since we were sindered young,
I've never seen your face, nor heard
The music o' your tongue ;
But I could hug all wretchedness,
And happy could I dee,
Did I but ken your heart still dreamed
O' bygane days and me !"*

These were some of the lines he remembered (they were great favourites of Shena Vân in former times) ; but instead of this compassionating of himself by proxy, as it were, leading him to any gentleness of feeling, it only made him the more bitter and angry. "I have had enough of this—I have had enough of it," he kept repeating to himself. "Very few men I know have kept as straight as I have. They'd better look out. I have had just about enough of this."

That evening he dined with the officers at Fort George, and drank far more wine than

he usually did—for he was very abstemious in that direction. After dinner, he proposed unlimited loo ; but more moderate counsels prevailed, and the familiar and innocent sixpenny Nap was agreed upon. But even at this mild performance you can lose a fair amount if you persistently “go Nap” on almost any sort of a hand that turns up.

CHAPTER VI.

A GUESS.

SOME well-known pieces of writing have described to us the ecstatic visions vouchsafed to the incipient opium-eater ; and these, or some of these, may be a faithful enough record. At all events, Yolande's first and only experience was of a very different character. All through that terrible night one horror succeeded another ; and always she felt as if she were bound and gagged—that she could neither flee away from those hideous things nor shriek out her fear and cry for aid. First she was in a vast forest of impenetrable gloom ; it was night, and yet there was a grayness in the open glade ; there was no sky visible ; she was alone. Then down one of these glades came a slow procession—figures walking two by two ; and at first she thought they were monks, but as she came nearer she could see that within each cloak and hood

there was a skeleton, with eyes of white fire. They took no heed of her; she could not move; in the awful silence she beheld them range themselves behind the trunks of the great oaks, and although they were now invisible it appeared to her that she could still see their eyes of fire, and that they were gazing on the figure of a woman that now drew near. The woman was wringing her hands; her hair was dishevelled; she looked neither to the right nor to the left. And, then, as she passed, the spectres came out two by two, and formed a crowd and followed her; they pressed on her and surrounded her, though she did not seem to see them; it was a doom overtaking her; the night grew darker; a funeral song was heard far away—not as from any opening heavens, but within the black hollows of the wood—and then the ghastly pageant disappeared.

Presently she was in a white world of snow and ice, and a frantic despair had seized her, for she knew that she was drifting away from the land. This way and that she tried to escape; but always she came to a blue impassable chasm; she tried to spring from one

side to the other, but something held her back ; she could not get away. There was a fire-mountain there—the red flames looking so strange in the middle of the white world ; and the noise of the roaring of it was growing fainter and more faint as she floated away on this moving ice. The sea that she was entering—she could see it far ahead of her—was black ; but a thin gray mist hung over it ; and she knew that once she was within that mist she would see nothing more, nor be heard of more, for ever and ever. She tried no longer to escape ; horror had paralysed her ; she wanted to call aloud for help, but could not. Denser and denser grew the mist ; and now the black sea was all around her ; she was as one already dead ; and when she tried to think of those she was leaving for ever, she could not remember them. Her friends ?—the people she knew ?—she could remember nothing. This vague terror and hopelessness filled her mind ; otherwise it was a blank ; she could look, but she could not think—and now the black waters had reached almost to her feet, and around her were the impenetrable folds of air so that she could no longer see.

And so she passed from one vision of terror to another all through the long night ; until in the gray of the morning she slowly awoke to a sort of half-stupefied consciousness. She had a headache, so frightful that at first she could scarcely open her eyes ; but she did not mind that ; she was overjoyed that she could convince herself of her escape from those hideous phantoms, and of her being in the actual living world. Then she began to recollect. She thought of what she had done—perhaps with a little touch of pride, as of something that *he* might approve, if ever he should come to know. Then, though her head was throbbing so dreadfully, she cautiously opened her eyes to look around.

No sooner had she done so than Jane, who was awake, stole noiselessly to her young mistress's bedside. Yolande made a gesture to ensure silence—for she saw that her mother was lying asleep ; then she rose, wrapped a shawl round her, and slipped out of the room, followed by her maid.

“What shall I get you Miss—I have kept the fire alight downstairs—I can get you a cup of tea in a minute.”

"No, no, never mind," said Yolande, pressing her hand to her head. "Tell me about my mother. How long has she been asleep?"

"Not very long. Oh, she has passed a dreadful night—the poor lady. She was so excited at first, I thought she would have killed herself; but in the end she fairly cried herself to sleep, after I got her to lie down on the bed. And you don't feel very ill, Miss, I hope? But it was a terrible thing for you to do."

"What?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss," said Jane, with a little embarrassment; "but I guessed what you had done. I guessed from what the poor lady said. Oh, you won't do that again, will you, Miss? You might have killed yourself; and then whatever should I have said to your papa? And I don't think you will ever have need to do it again—I heard what the poor lady kept saying to herself—you won't have to do any such terrible thing again—she declares that she will kill herself before you have cause to do that again——"

"I hope there won't be any occasion,"

said Yolande, calmly ; and then she went to the window.

It was truly a miserable morning—dull and gray and overclouded ; and it had rained during the night ; the street and the terrace were sodden and wet ; and a leaden-hued sea tumbled on to the empty beach. But notwithstanding that, and notwithstanding her headache, Yolande vaguely felt that she had never looked on a fairer picture. This plain, matter-of-fact, commonplace world was such a beautiful thing after those phantom horrors through which she had passed. She liked to look at the solid black boats high up on the shingle ; at the terraced foot-way ; at the iron railing along the road. She began to wish to be out in that substantial world ; to see more of it, and more closely ; perhaps the cold sea breezes would temper the racking pain in her head ?

“ Jane,” said she, “ do you think you could slip into the room and bring me my things without waking my mother ? ”

“ But you are not going out, Miss ? ” said the maid, wondering. “ The night is scarcely over yet. Won’t you go back and lie down ? ”

“No, no,” said Yolande, almost with a shudder of dread. “I have had terrible dreams—I want to get outside—and I have a headache, besides; perhaps the fresh air will make it better. But you can lie down, Jane, after I have gone; and don’t wake my mother, no matter how late she sleeps. When I come back perhaps the people in the house will be up, and I shall try to take some breakfast——”

“I could get it for you now, Miss,” said Jane, eagerly.

“I could not touch it,” the girl said, shivering.

The maid went and fetched her things; and when she had dressed she stole noiselessly down the stairs and got outside. How cold and damp the air felt; but yet it was fresh and new and strange; the familiar sound of the sea seemed pleasant and companionable. As yet, in the dull gray dawn, the little town appeared to be asleep; all the people she could find as she passed were a policeman, leaning against a railing and reading a newspaper, two men working at the roadway, and a maid-servant cleaning the

windows of a first-floor parlour. She walked on ; and pushed back the hair from her forehead to let the cool sea breeze dispel this racking pain. But although the headache was a bad one, and although it was a most rare thing for her to know what a headache was, still it did not depress her. She walked on with an increasing gladness. This was a fine, real world ; there were no more processions of skeletons, or Arctic mists, or fields covered with coffins. This was Worthing : there was the pier ; these were most substantial and actual waves that came rolling in until they thundered over and rushed seething and hissing up the beach. Moreover, was there not a gathering sense of light somewhere—as if the day were opening and inclined to shine ? As she walked on in the direction of Lower Lancing a more spacious view of sea and sky opened out before her ; and it appeared to her that away in the direction of Brighton the clouds seemed inclined to bank up. And then, gradually and here and there, faint gleams of a warmer light came shooting over from the east ; and in course of time, as she still followed the wind-

ings of the shore, the rising sun shone level along the sea, and the yellow-brown waves, though their curved hollows were in shadow as they rolled on to the beach, had silver-gleaming crests, and the wide stretches of retreating foam that gurgled and hissed down the shingly slopes were a glare of cream-white dazzling to the eyes.

She walked quickly—and proudly. She had played a bold game ; and she hoped that she might win. Nay, more, she was prepared to play it again. She would not shrink from any sacrifice ; it was with no light heart that she had undertaken this duty. And would *he* approve ?—that was always her secret thought, though generally she tried to banish all remembrances of what was bygone. Should he ever come to know of what she had done ? For it was of her own planning. It was not his suggestion at all ; probably, if he had thought of such a means of terrorism, he would not have dared to recommend it. But she had laid this plan ; and she had watched her opportunity ; and she was glad that some days had elapsed before that opportunity had occurred, so that her mother had

had time to become attached to her. And what if that once did not suffice? Well, she was prepared to go on. It was only a headache (and even that was quietly lessening, for she had an elastic constitution, and was a most capable walker). What were a few headaches? But no—she did not think that much repetition of this experiment would be necessary; she could not believe that any mother alive could look on and see her daughter poisoning herself to save her.

The morning cleared and brightened; when she got to Lancing, she struck inland, by the quiet country ways; a kind of gladness filled her. And if she should be successful, after all—if the thing that she had feared was to turn out a beautiful thing—if the rescue of this poor mother was to be her reward, what should she not owe him who had told her what her duty was. He had not been afraid to tell her—although she was only a girl. Ah, and where was he now? Driven away into banishment, perhaps, by what had happened up there in the north, through her blindness and carelessness. Once or twice, indeed, during these long

evenings, she had followed out a curious fancy that perhaps his crossing the Monalea hills to catch the afternoon train at Kingussie had really some connection with her coming south. Had he wished to see that she was secure and guarded, now that she was embarked on an errand of his suggestion? It pleased her to think of him being in the same train. Perhaps—in the cold gray morning at Euston Station—standing backward from the people, he had watched her get into the cab; perhaps he had even followed in his own cab and seen her enter the hotel? Why should he have hurried to catch that particular train? Why should he have adopted that arduous route across the hills, unless it was that he wished to travel with her, and yet without her knowing it? But it was so strange he should make this long journey merely to see that she was safely lodged in her hotel.

Now she had been studying this matter on one or two occasions—and letting her fancy play about it with a strange curiosity—but it was on this particular morning, as she was nearing the little village of Sompting, that a new light suddenly flashed in on her. Who

was it who had told Lawrence and Lang of her being in London? who had explained to them what her business was? who had asked Mr. Lang to go to her hotel and see her? Was it possible, then, that he had journeyed to London in that same train, and gone direct to the lawyers' office, so that she should have their assistance? He knew they were her father's lawyers; for she herself had told him to whom she should apply in case of difficulty; whereas, on the other hand, it was not possible for her father to have written. Had he been guarding her, then, and watching over her, all that time—perhaps even looking on? And if looking on—then, in a breathless kind of way, she recalled the circumstances of her taking her mother away. She had been disturbed and bewildered, no doubt; still had she not the impression of some one darting by—some one who felled the man who had seized her arm, and then passed quickly by? Surely, surely it must have been he. Who else could have known? Who else could have interfered? Her heart grew warm with gratitude towards him. Ah, there was the true friend—watching over her but

still keeping back, and unrequited with a single word of thanks. She began to convince herself that this must have been so. She accused herself of blindness that she had not seen it before. And for how long had his guardianship continued? When had he gone away? Perhaps——

Then her face grew pale. Perhaps he was even now in Worthing, still exercising this invisible care over her? Perhaps she might meet him, by some accident, in the street. She stopped short in the road, apparently afraid to go on. For what would their meeting be, if such a meeting were to happen? But no, it would not happen—it should not happen. Even if he were in Worthing (and she tried to get rid of the dreams and fancies begotten of this morning walk) he would not seek to see her; he would avoid her rather; he would know, as well as she, that it was not fit and proper that they should meet. And why should he be in Worthing? His guardianship there could be of no avail; she had nothing to fear in any direction where he could help. The more she calmly reviewed the possibilities of the case, the more she

considered it likely that he had indeed come to London with her; that he had given instructions to the lawyers; perhaps, even, that he had been present when she bore her mother off. But even if these things were so, by this time he must have left, perceiving that he could do no more, And whither? She had a kind of dim notion that he would not quickly return to Gress. But whither, then, whither? She saw him an outcast and a wanderer; she imagined him away in far places; and the morning seemed less cheerful now. Her face grew grave; she walked firmly on. She was returning to her appointed task, and to any trials that might be in store for her in connection with it.

She was getting near to Broadwater when she saw along the road a pony-carriage coming quickly in her direction; the next moment she perceived that her mother was in it, and that Jane (who had been brought up in the country) was driving. A few seconds sufficed to bring them to her, and then the mother, who seemed much excited, got out from the trap, and caught her daughter by both shoulders, and stroked

her hair and her face in a sort of delirium of joy.

"We have been driving everywhere in search of you—I was so afraid—ah, you are alive, and well, and beautiful as ever—my child, my child, I have not murdered you!——"

"Hush, mother," said the girl, quite calmly. "It is a pity you got up so early. I came out for a walk because my head was bad; it is getting better now; I will drive you back if you like."

She drew the girl aside for a few yards, caressing her arm and stroking her fingers.

"My child, I ought to be ashamed and miserable; but to see you alive and well—I—I was in despair—I was afraid. But you need not fear any more, Yolande, you need not fear any more."

"I hope not, mother," said Yolande, gravely, and she regarded her mother; "for I think I would rather die than go through again such a night as last night."

"But you need not fear—you need not fear!" said the other, pressing her hand. "Oh no. When I saw you lying on the bed

last night—then—then I seemed to know what I was. But you need not fear. No, never again will you have to poison yourself in order to shame me.”

“It was not to shame you, mother—it was to ask you not to take any more of that—that medicine.”

“You need not fear, Yolande, you need not fear!” she repeated, eagerly. “Oh no; I have everything prepared now. I will never again touch it—you shall never have to sacrifice yourself like that——”

“Well, I am glad of it, dear mother, for both our sakes,” Yolande said. “I hope it will not cost you much suffering.”

“Oh no, it will not cost me much suffering,” said the mother, with a strange sort of smile.

Something in her manner attracted her daughter’s attention.

“Shall we go back?” she asked.

“But I wished you to understand, Yolande, that you need have no longer any fear——”

“You have promised, mother.”

“Yes, but did I not promise before? Ah, you—you so young, so strong, so self-reliant

—you cannot tell how weak one can be. But now that is all over. This time I know. This time I can tell that I have tasted that poison for the last time—if there were twenty bottles standing by, it would not matter.”

“ You must nerve yourself, mother——”

“ Oh, but I have made it secure in another way,” she said, with the same curious smile.

“ How then ?”

“ Well, what am I worth in the world ? What is the value of my life ? It is a wreck and worthless ; to save it for a week, for a day, would I let you have one more headache, and be driven away into the country by yourself like this ? Ah no, Yolande ; but now you are secure ; there will be no more of that ; when I feel that I must break my promise again—when I am like to die with weakness and—and the craving—then, if there were twenty bottles standing by, you need not fear. If living is not bearable, then, rather than you should do again what you did last night, I will kill myself—and gladly !”

Yolande regarded her with the same calm air.

“And is that the end you have appointed for me, mother?”

Her mother was stupefied for a second; then she uttered a short quick cry of terror.

“Yolande, what do you mean?”

“I think I have told you, mother, that I mean to follow your example in all things—to the end, whatever it may be. Do not let us speak of it.”

She put her hand on her mother's arm, and led her back to the pony-carriage. But the poor woman was trembling violently. This terrible threat had quite unnerved her. It had seemed to her so easy, if the worst came to the worst—if she could control her craving no longer,—that, sooner than her daughter should be sacrificed, she herself should throw away this worthless fragment of existence that remained to her. And now Yolande's manner frightened her. This easy way of escape was going to produce the direst of all catastrophes? She regarded the girl—who was preoccupied and thoughtful, and who allowed Jane to continue to drive—all the way back; and there was something in her look that sent the conviction to her

mother's heart that that had been no idle menace.

When they got back to Worthing, Yolande set about the usual occupations of the day with her accustomed composure, and even with a measure of cheerfulness. She seemed to attach little importance to the incident that had just happened, and probably wished her mother to understand that she meant to see this thing through as she had begun it. But it was pitiable to see the remorse on the mother's face when a slight contraction of Yolande's brow told that from time to time her head still swam with pain.

The first hamper of game from the north arrived that day; and it was with a curious interest that the mother (who was never done wondering at her daughter's knowledge and accomplishments and opinions) listened to all that Yolande could tell her about the various birds and beasts. As yet the ptarmigan showed no signs of donning their winter plumage; but the mountain hares here and there — especially about the legs — showed traces of white appearing underneath the brownish-gray. Both at the foot and at the top

of the hamper was a thick bed of stags-horn moss (which grows in extraordinary luxuriance at Ailt-nam-ba), and Yolande guessed—and guessed correctly—that Duncan, who had observed her on one or two occasions bring home some of that moss, had fancied that the young lady would like to have some sent her to the south. And she wondered whether there was any other part of the world where people were so thoughtful and so kind—even to visitors who were almost strangers to them.

At night, when Yolande went into the bedroom, she noticed that there was no bottle on the mantelpiece.

“Where is it, mother?” she said.

“I have thrown it away. You need not fear now, Yolande,” her mother said. And then she regarded her daughter nervously. “Don’t mind what I said this morning, child. It was foolish. If I cannot bear the suffering well, it cannot be so hard a thing to die; that must come if one waits.”

“You are not going to die, mother,” said Yolande, gently patting her on the shoulder. “You are going to live; for some day, as

soon as you are strong enough, you and I are going to Nice, to drive all the way along to Genoa ; and I know all the prettiest places to stop at. But you must have courage and hope and determination. And you must get well quickly, mother ; for I should like to go away with you ; it is such a long, long time since I smelt the lemon-blossom in the air."

CHAPTER VII.

A MESSAGE.

As subsequent events were to prove, Yolande had, by this one bold stroke, achieved the victory she had set her heart upon. But as yet she could not know that. She could not tell that the frantic terror of the poor mother at the thought that she might have killed her only child would leave an impression strong enough to be a sufficient safeguard. Indeed, she could see no end to the undertaking on which she had entered; but she was determined to prosecute that with unfailing patience and with hope in the final result; and also, perhaps, with the consciousness that this immediate duty absorbed her from the consideration of other problems of her life.

But while she tried to shut up all her cares and interests within this little town of Worthing—devising new amusements and occupations, keeping her mother as much as possible

in the open air, and lightly putting aside the poor woman's remorse over the incidents of that critical night—there came to her reminders from the outer and further world. Among these was the following letter from the Master of Lynn, which she read with strangely diverse emotions contending for mastery in her mind :—

“ Station Hotel, Inverness, October 2.

“ MY DEAREST YOLANDE—It is only this morning that I have got your address from Allt-nam-ba ; and I write at once, though perhaps you will not care to be bothered with much correspondence just at present. Your father has told me what has taken you to the south ; and indeed I had guessed something of the kind from the note you sent me when you were leaving. I hope you are well, and not over-troubled ; and when you have time I should be glad to have a line from you—though I shall not misconstrue your silence if you prefer to be silent. In fact, I probably should not write to you now but that your father is leaving Allt-nam-ba shortly ; and I suppose he will see you as soon as he goes

south ; and I think I am bound to give you some explanation as to how matters stand. No doubt he will think it strange that I have rather kept out of his way ; and very likely he will be surprised that my father has never called at the lodge, or shown any sign of civility, and so forth. Well, the plain truth is, dear Yolande, that I have quarrelled with my father, if that can be called a quarrel which is all on one side—for I simply retire, on my part, and seek quiet in an Inverness hotel. The cause of the quarrel, or estrangement, is that he is opposed to our marriage ; and he has been put up to oppose it, I imagine, chiefly by my aunt, the elderly and agreeable lady whom you will remember meeting at the Towers. I think I am bound in honour to let you know this ; not that it in the least affects either you or me, as far as our marriage is concerned, for I am old enough to manage my own affairs ; but in order to explain a discourtesy which may very naturally have offended your father, and also to explain why I, feeling ashamed of the whole business, have rather kept back, and so failed to thank your father, as otherwise I

should have done, for his kindness to me. Of course I knew very well when we became engaged in Egypt that my father, whose political opinions are of a fine old crusted order, would be rather aghast at my marrying the daughter of the Member for Slagpool; but I felt sure that when he saw you and knew you, dear Yolande, he would have no further objection; and indeed I did not anticipate that the eloquence of my venerated aunt would have deprived him of the use of his senses. One ought not to write so of one's parent, I know; but facts are facts; and if you are driven out of your own home through the bigotry of an old man and the cattish temper of an old woman, and if you have the most angelic of sisters taken to nagging at you with letters, and if you are forced into the sweet seclusion of a hotel adjoining a railway-station, then the humour of the whole affair begins to be apparent, and you may be inclined to call things by their real names. I have written to your father to say that he need not bother about either the dogs or the horses; when he has left I will run down to Allt-nam-ba and see them sent

off ; but I have not told him why I am at present in Inverness ; and I tell you, my dear Yolande, because I think you ought to know exactly how matters stand. I should not be at all surprised to hear from you that you had imagined something of the state of the case ; for you must have wondered at their not asking you and your father to dinner, or something of the kind, after Polly taking you to the Towers when you first came north ; but at all events, this is how we are situated now, and I should be inclined to make a joke of the whole affair, if it were not that when I think of you I feel a little bit indignant. Of course, it cannot matter to you—not in the least. It is disagreeable, that is all. If dogs delight to bark and bite, it does not much matter so long as they keep their barking and biting among themselves. It is rather hard, certainly, when they take possession of your house, and turn you out into the street ; especially when you have a lovely sister come and accuse you of having no higher ambition in life than playing billiards with commercial travellers.

“ I shall hang on here, I expect, until our

other tenants—they who have the forest—leave for the south ; then I shall be able to make some final arrangements with our agent here ; after which I shall consider myself free. You must tell me, dear Yolande, when and where you wish to see me—of course, I don't wish to inconvenience or trouble you in any way—I shall leave it entirely in your hands as to what you would have me do. Perhaps if I go away for a while, the people at Lynn may come to their senses. Polly has been at them once or twice ; she is a warm ally of yours ; but to tell you the truth I would not have you made the subject of any appeal. No word of that kind shall come from me. Most likely when the last of the people that the Grahams have with them at Inverstroy have gone, Polly may go over to Lynn and establish herself there, and have a battle-royal with my revered aunt. Of course I would not bother you with the details of this wretched family squabble if I did not think that some explanation were due both to you and to your father.

“ I shall be glad to hear from you, if you are not too much occupied. — Yours affectionately,

ARCHIE LESLIE.”

“*P.S.*—I hope to be able to leave here about the 22d.”

Her first impulse was to rush away at once and telegraph to him, begging him not to come south ; but a moment's reflection showed her that was unnecessary. She re-read the letter ; there was nothing of the impetuosity of a lover in it, but rather a studied kindness, and also a reticence with regard to her present surroundings and occupations that she could not but respect. For she knew as well as any one that this matter concerned him, too ; and she could even have forgiven a trace of apprehension on his part—seeing that a young man about to marry is naturally curious about the new conditions that are to surround him. His silence on this point seemed part of the careful consideration that prevailed throughout this message to her. Then it was so clear that he would be ruled by her wishes. He was not coming to claim her by the right he had acquired. She could put away this letter for future consideration, as she had for the moment put aside her engagement-ring. While she was first read-

ing it, some strange fancies and feelings had held possession of her—a quick contrition ; a desire to tell him everything, and so release herself from this bond ; a remonstrance with herself, and a vague kind of hope that she might make atonement by a life-long devotion to him, after this first duty to her mother had been accomplished. But these conflicting resolves she forced herself to discard. She would not even answer this letter now. There was no hurry. He would not come to Worthing if she did not wish it. And was it not fortunate that she could turn aside from unavailing regrets and from irresolute means and purposes to the actual needs of the moment ? She calmly put the letter in her pocket, and went away to see whether her mother were not ready for her morning drive. And now it had come to pass that whenever Yolande drew near there was a look of affection and gratitude in this poor woman's eyes that made the girl's heart glad.

Day after day passed ; the weather happened to be fine, and their exploration of the surrounding country was unwearied. The castles of Arundel and Bramber, the parks of

Angmering and Badworth, Harrow Hill, Amberley Wild Brook, Sullington, Washington, Storrington, Ashington—they knew them all; and they had so educated the wise old pony that, when Jane was not with them, and they were walking along by the hedgeways or climbing a hill, they could safely leave him and the pony-carriage far behind them, knowing that he would come up at his leisure, keeping his own side of the road, and refusing to be tempted by the greenest of wayside patches. Yolande, both at home and abroad, was always on the watch, and carefully concealed the fact. But now she was beginning less and less to fear, and more and more to hope; nay, at times, and rather in spite of herself, a joyful conviction would rest upon her that she had already succeeded. Four days after that relapse, a desperate fit of depression overtook the poor woman; but she bravely fought through it.

“You need not fear this time, Yolande,” she would say, with a sad smile. “I said that once before, but I did not know then. I had not seen you lying on the bed—perhaps dying, as I thought. You shall have no more headaches through me.”

“Ah, dear mother,” said Yolande, “in a little time you will not even think of such things. You will have forgotten them. It will be all like a dream to you.”

“Yes, like a dream—like a dream”—the other said, absently. “It was in a dream that you came to me. I could not understand. I heard you, but I could not understand. And then it seemed that you were leading me away, but I scarcely knew who you were. And the evening in the hotel, when you were showing me your things, I could scarcely believe it all; and when you said you would get me a dressing-bag, I asked myself why I should take that from a stranger. You were so new to me—and tall—and so beautiful—it was a kind of wonder—I could not think you were indeed my own daughter—but a kind of angel—and I was glad to follow you.”

“Well, I carried you off,” said Yolande plainly (for she did not like to encourage fantasy). “There is no mistake about it; and I shall not let you go back to those friends of yours who were not at all good friends to you—that also is quite certain.”

“Oh no, no,” she would say, grasping the girl’s hand. “I am not going back—never, never, to that house. You need not fear now, Yolande.”

It has already been mentioned that this poor woman was greatly astonished that Yolande should know so much and should have seen so much, and read so many different things. And this proved to be a field of quite unlimited interest : for there was not a single opinion or experience of the girl that she did not regard with a strange fascination and sympathy. Whether Yolande was relating to her legendary stories of Brittany, of which she knew a good many, or describing the lonely streets of Pompeii, or telling her of the extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere in Washington (the physical atmosphere, that is), she listened with a kind of wonder, and with the keenest curiosity to know more and more of this young life that had grown up apart from hers. And then Yolande so far wandered from the path of virtue—as laid down by her father—as sometimes to read aloud in French ; and while she frequently halted and stumbled in reading aloud in

English, there never was any stumbling, but rather a touch of pride, when she was pronouncing such sonorous lines as this—

“La vaste mer murmure autour de son cercueil”

—and it was strange to the poor mother that her daughter should be more at home in reading French than in reading English. She would ask the minutest questions—about Yolande’s life at the Château, about her life on board ship during her various voyages, about her experiences in those mountain solitudes of the north. Her anxiety to be always in the society of her daughter was insatiable; she could scarcely bear to have her out of her sight. And when Lawrence and Lang sent her, in the course of time, her usual allowance of money, her joy was extreme. For now, whenever she and Yolande went out, she scanned the shop-windows with an eager interest, and always she was buying this, that, or the other trinket, or bit of pretty-coloured silk, or something of the kind for the girl to wear. Yolande had rather severe notions in the way of personal adornment; but she was well content to put a bit

of colour round her neck or an additional silver hoop round her wrist when she saw the pleasure in her mother's eyes.

At length she felt justified in sending the following letter to her father :—

“ Worthing, October 12.

“ MY DEAR PAPA—I intend this to reach you before you leave Allt-nam-ba ; because it carries good news ; and I know you have been anxious. I think everything goes well—sometimes I am quite sure of it—sometimes I look forward to such a bright future. It has been a great struggle and pain (but not to me, please do not speak of me at all in your letters, because that is nothing at all), but I have not so much fear now. Perhaps it is too soon to be certain ; but I cannot explain to you in a letter what it is that gives me such hope ; that drives away what reason suggests, and *compels* me to think that all will be well. Partly, it is my mother's look. There is an assurance in it of her determination—of her feeling that all is safe now ; again and again she says to me, ‘ I have been in a dream ; but now I am come out of it.

You need not fear now.' Mr. Melville said I was not to be too sanguine, and always to be watchful; and I try to be that; but I cannot fight against the joyful conviction that my mother is now safe from that thing. Only, she is so weak and ill yet—she tries to be brave and cheerful to give me comfort; but she suffers. Dear papa, it is madness that you should reproach yourself for doing nothing, and propose to take us to the Mediterranean. No, no; it will not do at all. My mother is too weak yet to go anywhere; when she is well enough to go I will take her; but I must take her alone; she is now used to me; there must be no such excitement as would exist if you were to come for us. I am very thankful to Mr. Shortlands that you are going to Dalescroft; and I hope you will find charming people at his house, and also that the shooting is good. Dear papa, I hope you will be able to go over to Slagpool while you are in the north; and perhaps you might give an address or deliver a lecture—there are many of the Members doing that now, as I see by the newspapers, and you owe something to your constituents

for not grumbling about your going to Egypt.

“I hope everything has been comfortable at the lodge since I left; but that I am sure of, for Mrs. Bell would take care. You must buy her something very pretty when you get to Inverness, and send it to her as from you and me together—something very pretty, indeed, papa, for she was very kind to me, and I would not have her fancy that one forgets. Mr. Leslie says in a letter that he will see to the ponies and dogs being sent off, so that you need have no trouble; he is at the Station Hotel, as probably you know, if you wish to call and thank him. I remember Duncan saying that when the dogs were going he would take them over the hills to Kingussie and go with them by the train as far as Perth, where he has relatives, and there he could see that the dogs had water given them in the morning. But you will yourselves take them, perhaps, from Inverness? Another small matter, dear papa, if you do not mind the trouble, is this—Would you ask some one to pack up for me and send here the boards and drying paper and hand-press

that I had for the wild flowers? We go much into the country here, and have plenty of time in the evening; and my mother is so much interested in any pursuit of mine that this would be an additional means of amusing her. You do not say whether you have heard anything further of Mr. Melville.

“Do not think I am sad, or alone, or re-pining. Oh no; I am very well; and I am very happy when I see my mother pleased with me. We do a hundred things—examine the shop-windows, walk on the pier or along the promenade, or we drive to different places in the country, and sometimes we have lunch at the old-fashioned inns, and make the acquaintance of the people. So good-natured they are, and well-pleased with their own importance; but I do not understand them always, and my mother laughs. We call the pony Bertrand du Guesclin; I do not remember how it happened; but at all events he is not as adventurous as the Connétable: he is too wise to run any risks. But *when I am quite sure*, and if my mother is well enough for the fatigue of the voyage, I think I will

take her to the south of France, and then along the Riviera, for I fear the winter here, and she so delicate. Dear papa, you say I am not to mind the expense—very well, you see I am profiting by your commands. In the meantime I would not dare. I try to keep down my excitement—we amuse ourselves with the shops, with the driving, and what not—it is all simple, pleasant, and I wait for the return of her strength. Yes, I can see she is much depressed, sometimes; and then it is that she has been accustomed to fly for relief to the medicines; but now I think that is over, and the best to be looked forward to. Yes, in spite of caution, in spite of reason, I am already almost assured. There is something in her manner towards me that convinces me—there is a sympathy which has grown up—she looks at me as she does not look at any one else, and I understand. It is this that convinces me.

“Will you give a farewell gift to each of the servants, besides their wages? I think they deserve it; always they helped me greatly, and were so willing and obliging, instead of taking advantage of my ignorance.

I would not have them think that I did not recognise it, and was ungrateful. And *please*, papa, get something *very* pretty for Mrs. Bell. I do not know what. Something she could be proud to show to Mr. Melville would probably please her best.

“Write to me when you get to Dalescourt.—Your affectionate daughter,

“YOLANDE.”

There is no doubt that Yolande made those repeated references to Mr. Melville with the vague expectation of learning that perhaps he had returned to Gress. But if that was her impression she was speedily undeceived. The very next morning, as she went down into the small lobby, she saw something white in the letter-box of the door. The bell had not been rung, so that the servant-maid had not taken the letter out. Yolande did so, and saw that it was addressed to herself—in a handwriting that she instantly recognised. With trembling fingers she hastily broke open the envelope; and then read these words, written in pencil across a sheet of notepaper:—

“ You have done well. You will succeed. But be patient. Good-bye.—J. M.”

She stood still—bewildered—her heart beating quickly. Had he been there all the time, then?—always near her; watching her; guarding her; observing the progress of the experiment he had himself suggested? And now, whither had he gone—without a word of thanks and gratitude? Her mother was coming down the stairs. She quickly concealed the letter, and turned to meet her. In the dusk of this lobby the mother observed nothing strange or unusual in the look of her daughter's face.

CHAPTER VIII.

A LAST INTERVENTION.

IT has already been said of Mrs. Graham, as of her brother, that she was not altogether mercenary. She had a certain share of sentiment in her composition. It is true, she had summarily stamped out the Master's boyish fancies with regard to Janet Stewart ; but then, on the other hand (when the danger to the estates of Lynn was warded off), she could afford to cherish those verses to Shênâ Vâñ with a sneaking fondness. Nay, more than that, she paid them the compliment of imitation—unknown to her husband and everybody else ; and it may be worth while to print this, her sole and only literary effort, if only to show that, just as sempstresses imagine the highest social circles to be the realm of true romance, and like to be told of the woes and joys of high-born ladies, so this pretty Mrs. Graham, being the only daughter

of a nobleman, when casting about for a properly sentimental situation, must needs get right down to the bottom of the social ladder, and think it fine to speak of herself as a sailor's lass. One small touch of reality remained—the hero she named Jim. But here are the verses to speak for themselves :—

*“ I care not a fig for your brag, you girls
And dames of high degree ;
Or for all your silks and satins and pearls,
As fine as fine may be ;
For I'll be as rich as dukes and earls
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*It's in Portsmouth town that I know a lane,
And a small house jolly and free,
That's sheltered well from the wind and the rain,
And as snug as snug can be ;
And it's there that we'll be sitting again
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*'Twas a fine brave sight when the yards were manned,
Though my eyes could scarcely see ;
It's a long, long sail to the Rio Grand',
And a long, long waiting for me ;
But I'll envy not any one in the land
When my Jim comes home from sea.*

*So here's to your health, you high-born girls
And ladies of great degree ;
And I hope you'll all be married to earls,*

*As proud as proud may be ;
But I wouldn't give fourpence for all of your pearls
When my Jim comes home from sea."*

Of course, she carefully concealed these verses—especially from her husband, who would have led her a sad life if he had found them and discovered the authorship ; and they never attained to the dignity of type in the *Inverness Courier*, where the lines to Shena Vân had appeared ; but all the same pretty Mrs. Graham regarded them with a certain pleasure, and rather approved of the independence of the Portsmouth young lady, although she had a vague impression that she might not be quite the proper sort of guest to ask to Inverstry.

Now her anger and dismay over the possible breaking down of the scheme which she had so carefully formed and tended were due to various causes, and did not simply arise from a wish that the Master of Lynn should marry a rich wife. It was her project, for one thing ; and she had a certain sentimental fondness in regarding it. Had she not wrought for it, too, and striven for it ? Was it for nothing that she had trudged through

the dust of the Merhadj bazaars, and fought with cockroaches in her cabin, and gasped with the Egyptian heat all those sweltering afternoons? She began to consider herself ill-treated, and did not know which to complain of the more—her brother's indifference or her father's obstinacy. Then she could get no sort of sympathy from her husband. He only laughed—and went away to look after his pheasants. Moreover, she knew very well that this present condition of affairs could not last. The Master's ill-temper would increase rather than abate. Yolande would grow accustomed to his neglect of her. Perhaps Mr. Winterbourne would interfere and finally put an end to that pretty dream she had dreamed about as they went sailing down the Mediterranean.

Accordingly she determined to make one more effort. If she should not be able to coax Lord Lynn into a more complaisant frame of mind, at least she could go on to Allt-nam-ba and make matters as pleasant as possible with Mr. Winterbourne before he left. The former part of her endeavour, indeed, she speedily found to be hopeless.

She had no sooner arrived at the Towers than she sought out her father and begged him to be less obdurate ; but when, as she was putting forward Corrievreak as her chief argument, she was met by her father's affixing to Corrievreak, or rather prefixing to it, a solitary and emphatic word—a word that was entirely out of place, too, as applied to a sanctuary—she knew it was all over. Lord Lynn sometimes used violent language, for he was a hot-tempered man ; but not language of that sort ; and when she heard him utter that dreadful wish about such a sacred thing as the sanctuary of a deer-forest she felt it was needless to continue further.

“Very well, papa,” said she, “I have done my best. It is not my affair. Only, everything might have been made so pleasant for us all——”

“Yes, and for the Slagpool Radicals,” her father said, contemptuously. “I suppose they would land at Foyers, with banners ; and have picnics in the forest !”

“At all events, you must remember this, papa,” said Mrs. Graham, with some sharpness, “that Archie is a gentleman. He is

pledged to marry Miss Winterbourne. And marry her he will."

"Let him and welcome!" said this short, stout, thick person with the bushy eyebrows and angry eyes. "He may marry the dairy-maid if he likes. I suppose the young gentleman has a right to his own tastes. But I say he shall not bring his low acquaintances about this house while I am alive!"

Mrs. Graham herself had a touch of the family temper; and for a second or two her face turned quite pale with anger; and when she spoke it was in a kind of forced and breathless way.

"I don't know what you mean. Who are low acquaintances? Yolande Winterbourne is my friend. She is fit to marry any one in the land—I care not what his rank is—and—and I will not have such things said—she is my friend. Low acquaintances?—if it comes to that, it was I who introduced Archie to Mr. Winterbourne—and—and this is what I know about them, that if they are not fit to—to be received at Lynn, then neither am I!"

And with that she walked calmly (but still with her face rather pale) out of the room,

and shut the door behind her ; and then went away and sought out her own dressing-room of former days, and locked herself in there and had a good cry. She did feel injured. She was doing her best, and this was what she got for it. But she was a courageous little woman, and presently she had dried her eyes and arranged her dress for going out ; then she rang and sent a message to the stables to get the dog-cart ready, for that she wanted to drive to Allt-nam-ba.

By and by she was driving along by the side of the pretty loch, under the great hills ; and she was comforting herself with more cheerful reflections.

“ It is no matter,” she was saying to herself. “ If only Mr. Winterbourne remains in good humour, everything will go right. When Archie is married, he will be rich enough to have a home where he pleases. I suppose Jim wouldn’t have them always with us ?—though it would be nice to have Yolande in the house, especially in the long winter months. But Archie could build a house for himself ; and sell it when he no longer wanted it. The country about Loch

Eil would please Yolande ; I wonder if Archie could get a piece of land anywhere near Fassiefern ; that would be handy for having a yacht, too, and of course they will have a yacht. Or why shouldn't he merely rent a house—one of those up Glen Urquhart, if only the shooting was a little better ; or over Glen Spean way, if Lochaber isn't a little too wild for Yolande ; or perhaps they might get a place in Glengarry, for Yolande is so fond of wandering through woods. No doubt Archie exaggerated that affair about Yolande's mother ; in any case it could easily be arranged ; other families have done so, and everything gone on as usual. Then if they had a town-house we might all go to the Caledonian Ball together ; Archie looks so well in the kilt ; and Yolande might go as Flora Macdonald."

She drove quickly along the loch-side, but moderated her pace when she reached the rough mountain-road leading up the glen, for she knew she would not mend matters by letting down one of her father's horses. And as she approached Allt-nam-ba a chill struck her heart—those preparations for departure

were so ominous. Duncan was in front of the bothy, giving the rifles and guns their last rub with oil before putting them into the cases ; boxes of empty soda-water bottles had been hauled out by the women-folk for the men to screw up ; a cart with its shafts resting on the ground stood outside the coach-house ; and various figures went hurrying this way and that. And no sooner had Mrs. Graham driven up and got down from the dog-cart, than her quick eye espied a tall black-bearded man who, from natural shyness—or perhaps he wanted to have a look at Duncan's gun-rack—had retreated into the bothy ; and so, instead of going into the house, she quickly followed him into the wide, low-roofed apartment, which smelt considerably of tobacco-smoke.

“Isn't your name Angus ?” said she.

“Yes, ma'am,” said he, with a very large smile, that showed he recognised her.

“I suppose Mr. Macpherson has sent you about the inventory ?”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“Have you been over the house yet ?”

“No, ma’am ; I have just come out with the empty cart from Inverfariguig.”

“Well, then, Angus, you need not go over the house. I don’t want the gentlemen bothered. Go back and tell Mr. Macpherson I said so.”

“There was £7 of breakages with the last tenant, ma’am,” said he, very respectfully.

“Never mind,” said she ; and she took out her purse, and got hold of a sovereign. “Go back at once ; and if you have to sleep at Whitebridge that will pay the cost ; or you may get a lift in the mail-cart. My brother is in Inverness, isn’t he ?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Then you can go to him, and tell him I said there was to be no going over the inventory. This tenant is a friend of mine. You go to my brother when you get to Inverness, and he will explain to Mr. Macpherson. Now good-bye, Angus”—and she shook hands with him, as is the custom in that part of the country, and went.

The arrival of a stranger at Allt-nam-ba was such an unusual circumstance that, when she went up to the door of the lodge, she

found both Mr. Winterbourne and John Shortlands awaiting her—they having seen her drive up the glen ; and she explained that she had been leaving a message with one of the men.

“ I heard you were leaving, Mr. Winterbourne,” said she, with one of her most charming smiles, when they had got into the drawing-room, “ and I could not let you go away without coming to say good-bye. Both my husband and I expected to have seen much more of you this autumn ; but you can see for yourself what it is in the Highlands—every household is so wrapt up in its own affairs that there is scarcely any time for visiting. If Inverstroy had come to Allt-nam-ba, Inverstroy would have found Allt-nam-ba away shooting on the hill, and *vice versâ* ; and I suppose that is why old-fashioned people like my father have almost given up the tradition of visiting. When do you go ? ”

“ Well, if we are all packed and ready, I suppose this afternoon ; then we can pass the night at Foyers, and go on to Inverness in the morning.”

“ But if I had known I could have brought

some of the people from the Towers to help you. My father would have been delighted."

She said it without a blush; perhaps it was only a slip of the tongue.

"Do you think Mrs. Bell would suffer any interference?" said John Shortlands, with a laugh. "I can tell you, my dear Mrs. Graham, that she rules us with a rod of iron—though we're not supposed to know it."

"And how is dear Yolande?" said Mrs. Graham.

"She is very well," Yolande's father said, instantly lowering his eyes, and becoming nervous and fidgety.

"I heard something of what had called her away to the south—at least I presumed that was the reason," continued Mrs. Graham, forcing herself to attack this dangerous topic in order to show that, in her estimation at least, nothing too important had occurred. "Of course one sympathises with her. I hope you have had good news from her?"

"Oh yes," said he, hastily. "Oh yes. I had a letter last night. Yolande is very well."

"Archie," continued Mrs. Graham, think-

ing enough had been said on that point, "is at Inverness. I declare the way those lawyers fight over trifles is perfectly absurd. And I confess," she added, with a demure smile, "that the owners of deer-forests are not much better. Of course they always tell me I don't know—that it is my ignorance; but to find people quarrelling about the line the march should take—when an acre of the ground wouldn't give grazing for a sheep—seems stupid enough. Well now, Mr. Winterbourne, may I venture to ask how you found the shooting?"

"Oh, excellent — excellent," said he, brightly, for he also was glad to get away from that other topic. "We have not found as many deer coming about as we expected; but otherwise the place has turned out everything that could be wished."

"I am glad of that," said she, "for I know Archie had qualms about inducing you to take the shooting. I remember very well, on board ship, he used to think it was a risky thing—supposing the place had *not* turned out well, then you might have felt that—that——"

“No, no, my dear Mrs. Graham,” said he, with a smile, “*Caveat emptor*. I knew I was taking the place with the usual attending risks ; I should not have blamed your brother if we had had a bad year.”

She was just on the point of asking him whether he liked Allt-nam-ba well enough to come back again ; but she thought it was too dangerous. She had no means of knowing what he thought of Lord Lynn’s marked un-neighbourliness ; and she deemed it more prudent to go on talking of general subjects, in her light and cheerful way, and always on the assumption that the two families were on friendly terms, and that Yolande’s future home would be in the Highlands. At length she said she must be going.

“I would ask you to stay to lunch,” said Mr. Winterbourne, “but I daresay you know what lunch is likely to be on the day of leaving a shooting-box——”

“Dear me !” said she, in tones of vexation. “Why did they not think of that at the Towers ? They might have saved you a great deal of bother that way ; but they have got into an old-fashioned groove there——”

"At the same time, my dear Mrs. Graham," said Mr. Winterbourne, with great courtesy, "if you like to take the risk, I daresay Mrs. Bell can find you something; and we have not often the chance of entertaining any one at Allt-nam-ba. Will you take pity on us? Will you sit in Yolande's place? The house has been rather empty since she left."

"I should like it of all things," said pretty Mrs. Graham, taking off her hat and gloves and putting them on the sofa, "for I feel that I haven't given you half the messages I wish you to take to dear Yolande. And you must let me have her address, so that Jim can send her a haunch of venison at Christmas."

"I am afraid that would not be of much use, thank you," said he; "for I hope by that time, if all goes well, that Yolande will be away in the south of Europe."

"Archie is going south also," said Mrs. Graham, pleasantly. "There is little doing here in the winter. After he has made all the arrangements with papa's agents in Inverness, then he will be off to the south too. Where is Yolande likely to be?"

“Well, I don’t exactly know,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with a kind of anxious evasion. “But she will write to you. Oh yes, I will tell her to write to you. She is—she is much occupied at present—and—and perhaps she has not much time. But Yolande does not forget her friends.”

“She shall not forget me ; for I won’t let her,” said Mrs. Graham, blithely. “If she should try, I will come and ferret her out and give her a proper scolding. But I don’t think it will be needed.”

The luncheon, frugal as it was, proved to be a very pleasant affair ; for the two men-folk were glad to have the table brightened by the unusual presence of a lady-guest—who was, moreover, very pretty and talkative and cheerful ; while on the other hand, Mrs. Graham, having all her wits about her, very speedily assured herself that Yolande’s father was leaving Allt-nam-ba in no dudgeon whatever ; and also that, although he seemed to consider Yolande as at present set apart for some special duty, and not to be interfered with by any suggestions of future meetings or arrangements, he appeared to take it for

granted that ultimately she would live in the Highlands. Mrs. Graham convinced herself that all was well, and she was a skilful flatterer, and could use her eyes ; and altogether this was a very merry and agreeable luncheon party. Before she finally rose to go, she had got Yolande's address, and had undertaken to write to her.

And then she pleased Mr. Winterbourne very much by asking to see Mrs. Bell ; and she equally pleased Mrs. Bell by some cleverly turned compliments, and by repeating what the gentlemen had said about their obligations to her. In good truth, Mrs. Bell needed some such comfort. She was sadly broken down. When Mrs. Graham asked her about Mr. Melville, tears rose unbidden to the old dame's eyes ; and she had furtively to wipe them away with her handkerchief, while pretending to look out of the window.

"He has written two or three times to the young lad Dalrymple," said she, with just one suppressed sob ; "and all about they brats o' bairns, as if he wasna in mair consideration in people's minds than a when useless lads and lassies. And only a message or two to

me, about this family or the other family—the deil take them, that he should bother his head about their crofts and their cows and their seed-corn! And just as he might be having his ain back again—to gang awa' like that, without a word o' an address. I jalouse it's America—ay, I'm thinking it's America, for there they have the electric things he was aye speaking o'; and he was a curious man, that wanted to ken everything. I wonder what the Almichty was about when He put it into people's heads to get fire out o' running water; they might hae been content as they were; and Mr. Melville would hae been better occupit in planting his ain hillsides—as a' the lairds are doing nowadays—than in running frae ae American town to another wi' his boxes o' steel springs and things."

"But he is sure to write to you, Mrs. Bell," said Mrs. Graham.

"I just canna bear to think o't!" said the older woman, in a kind of despair. "I hope he didna leave because he thought I would be an encumbrance on him. I hae mair sense than that. But he's a proud man; though I shouldna say it.—Ay, and the

poor lad without a home—and without the land that belongs to him——”

The good old lady found this topic too much for her ; and she was retiring with an old-fashioned curtsey, when Mrs. Graham shook hands with her in the most friendly manner, and assured her that, if any tidings of Mr. Melville came to Inverstroy (as was almost certain), she would write at once.

CHAPTER IX.

LOOSENED CHAINS.

“ You have done well—you will succeed.” Yolande read and again read that brief note ; pondering over it in secret, and always with an increasing joy. He had seen ; he had approved. And now when she was walking about the streets of Worthing with her mother, she found a strange interest in guessing as to which of those houses he had lived in while, as she assured herself, he was keeping that invisible guard over her. Was it this one, or that ; or perhaps the hotel at the corner ? Had he been standing at the window there, and regarding her as she passed unconscious ? Had he seen her drive by in the little pony-carriage ? Had he watched her go along the pier, himself standing somewhere out of the way ? She had no longer any doubt that it was he who had gone to the office of Lawrence and Lang on the morning of her arrival

in London ; she was certain he must have been close by when she went to fetch her mother on that fateful evening. And her heart was full of gratitude to him ; and her brain was filled with fancies about him ; and her imagination (which refused to be controlled by all the vows and resolves she had made to herself, and which, moreover, had plenty of scope for exercise in the monotony of that Worthing life) went away seeking in strange and distant places, wondering where he might be, and what he was doing, and whether he was ever casting a look behind him.

And indeed, as time went on, it became more and more certain that that forgetfulness to which she had looked forward was still far from her ; and now she began to regard with a kind of dismay the prospect of the Master of Lynn coming to claim her. She knew it was her duty to become his wife ; that had been arranged and approved by her father ; she had herself pledged away her future ; and she had no right of appeal. She reminded herself of these facts a hundred times, and argued with herself ; she strove to banish those imaginings about one who ought

henceforth to be as one dead to her ; and strove also to prove to herself that, if she did what was right, unhappiness could not be the result ; but all the time there was growing up in her heart a fear—nay, almost a conviction—that this marriage was not possible. She turned away her eyes and would not regard it ; but this conviction pressed itself in on her whether she would or no. And then she would engage herself with a desperate assiduity in the trivial details of their daily life there, and try to gain forgetfulness that way.

This was the letter she wrote to the Master of Lynn, in reply to his. It cost her some trouble, and also here and there some qualm of self-reproach ; for she could not but know that she was not telling the whole truth :—

“Worthing, Wednesday afternoon.

“DEAR ARCHIE—I am exceedingly grieved to hear of your trouble with your family, and also to think that I am the cause of it. It seems so great a pity, and all the more that, in the present circumstances, it is so unnecessary. You will understand from my papa’s letter that the duty I have undertaken is

surely before any other ; and that one's personal wishes must be put aside, when it is a question of what a daughter owes to her mother. And to think there should be trouble and dissension now over what must in any case be so remote—that seems a very painful and unnecessary thing ; and surely, dear Archie, you can do something to restore yourself to your ordinary position with regard to your family. Do you think it is pleasant to me to think that I am the cause of a quarrel ? And to think also that this quarrel might be continued in the future ? But the future is so uncertain now in these new circumstances that I would pray you not to think of it, but to leave it aside, and become good friends with your family. And how, you may ask ? Well, I would consider our engagement at an end for the present ; let it be as nothing ; you will go back to Lynn ; I am here, in the position that I cannot go from ; let the future have what it may in store, it will be time to consider afterwards. Pray believe me, dear Archie, it is not in anger that I write ; or any resentment ; for I understand well that my papa's politics are not agreeable to every one ;

and I have heard of differences in families on smaller matters than that. And I pray you to believe that neither my father nor myself was sensible of any discourtesy—no, surely every one has the right to choose his friends as he pleases; nor could one expect one's neighbours to alter their habits of living, perhaps, and be at the trouble of entertaining strangers. No, there is neither resentment nor anger in my mind; but only a wish that you should be reconciled to your friends; and this is an easy way. It would leave you and me free for the time that might be necessary; you can go back to Lynn, where your proper place is; and I can give myself up to my mother, without other thoughts. Will you ask Mrs. Graham if that is not the wisest plan?—I am sure she must be distressed at the thought of your being estranged from your relatives; and I know she will think it a pity to have so much trouble about what must in any case be so distant. For to tell you the truth, dear Archie, I cannot leave to any one else what I have now undertaken: and it may be years of attention and service that are wanted; and why should you wait and wait, and always

with the constraint of a family quarrel around you? For myself, I already look at my position that way. I have put aside my engagement-ring. I have given myself over to the one who has most claims on me; and I am proud to think that I may have been of a little service already. Will you consent, dear Archie? then we shall both be free; and the future must be left to itself.

“It was so very kind of you to look after the sending away of the dogs and ponies from Allt-nam-ba; my papa has written to me from Dalescourt about it, and was very grateful to you. No, I will not tell him anything of what is in your letter; for it is not necessary it should be known—especially as I hope you will at once take steps for a reconciliation and think no more of it. And it was very good of your sister to go out and pay them a visit at Allt-nam-ba. I have had a letter from her also—as kind as she always is—asking me to go to Inverstroy at Christmas; but you will understand from what I have said that this is impossible, nor can I make any engagement with any one now, nor have I any desire to do so. I am satisfied

to be as I am—also, I rejoice to think that I have the opportunity; I wish for nothing more except to hear that you have agreed to my suggestion and gone back to Lynn. As for my mother and myself, we shall perhaps go to the south of France when she is a little stronger; but at present she is too weak to travel; and happily we find ourselves very well content with this place, now that we are familiar with it, and have found out different ways of passing the time. It is not so wild and beautiful as Allt-nam-ba; but it is a cheerful place for an invalid—we have a pretty balcony, from which we can look at the people on the promenade, and the sea, and the ships; and we have a pony-carriage for the country roads, and have driven almost everywhere in the neighbourhood.

“So now I will say good-bye, dear Archie; and I hope you will consider my proposal, and see that it is wise. What may occur in the future, who can tell?—but in the meantime let us do what is best for those around us; and I think this is the right way. I should feel far happier if I knew that you were not wondering when this service that I

owe to my mother were to end ; and also I should feel far happier to know that I was no longer the cause of disagreement and unhappiness in your family. Give my love to your sister when you see her ; and if you hear anything about the Gress people, I should be glad to hear some news about them also.—Believe me, yours affectionately,

“YOLANDE.”

She looked at this letter for a long time before putting it in an ^{*}envelope and addressing it ; and when she posted it, it was with a guilty conscience. So far as it went, she had told the truth. This duty she owed to her mother was paramount ; and she knew not for how long it might be demanded of her. And no doubt she would feel freer and more content in her mind if her engagement were broken off—if she had no longer to fear that he might be becoming impatient over the renewed waiting and waiting. But that was only part of the truth. She could not blind herself to the fact that this letter was very little more than a skilful piece of prevarication ; and this consciousness haunted her, and

troubled her, and shamed her. She grew uneasy. Her mother noticed that the girl seemed anxious and distraught, and questioned her; but Yolande answered evasively. She did not think it worth while to burden her mother's mind with her private disquietudes.

No; she had not been true to herself; and she knew it; and the knowledge brought shame to her cheeks when she was alone. With a conscience ill at ease, the cheerfulness with which she set about her ordinary task of keeping her mother employed and amused was just a little bit forced; and despite herself she fell into continual reveries—thinking of the arrival of the letter, of his opening it, of his possible conjectures about it. Then, besides these smitings of conscience, there was another thing: would he consider the reason she had advanced for breaking off the engagement as sufficient? Would he not declare himself willing to wait? The tone of his letter had been firm enough. He was unmoved by this opposition on the part of his own people; it was not to gain any release that he had written to her. And now might

he not still adhere to his resolution—refusing to make up the quarrel; resolved to wait Yolande's good pleasure; and so, in effect, requiring of her the fulfilment of her plighted troth?

It would be difficult to say which was the stronger motive—the shamed consciousness that she had not spoken honestly, or the ever-increasing fear that, after all, she might not be able to free herself from this impossible bond; but at all events she determined to supplement that letter with a franker one. Indeed, she stole out that same evening, under some pretence or other, and went to the post office, and sent off this telegram to him:—“*Letter posted to you this afternoon: do not answer it until you get the one following.*” Then she went back to the rooms quickly, her heart somewhat lighter, though, indeed, all during dinner she was puzzling to decide what she should say, and how to make her confession not too humiliating. She did not wish him to think too badly of her. Was it not possible for them to part friends? Or would he be angry, and call her “jilt,” “light o’ love,” and so forth, as she had called

herself? Indeed, she had reproached herself enough; anything that he could say would be nothing new to her. Only she hoped—for she had had a gentle kind of regard for him, and he had been mixed up in her imaginings of the future, and they had spent happy days and evenings together, on board ship or in the small lodge between the streams—that they might part friends, without angry words.

“Yolande, there is something troubling you,” her mother said, as they sat at table.

She had been watching the girl in her sad tender way. As soon as she had spoken Yolande instantly pulled herself together.

“Why, yes, there is indeed!” she said. “Shall I tell you what it is, mother? I have been thinking that soon we shall be as tired of pheasants as we were of grouse and hares. Papa sends us far too many; or rather it is Mr. Shortlands now; and I don’t know what to do with them—unless somebody in the town would exchange them. Is it possible? Would not that be an occupation now—to sit in a poulterer’s shop and say, ‘I will give you three brace of pheasants for so many of this and so many of that’?”

“You wrote a long letter this afternoon,” the mother said, absently. “Was it to Mr. Shortlands?”

“Oh no,” Yolande said, with a trifle of colour in her face. “It was to the Master of Lynn. I have often told you about him, mother. And one thing I quite forgot. I forgot to ask him to inquire of Mrs. Bell where the ballad of ‘Young Randal’ is to be found—you remember I told you the story? No; there is nothing of it in the stupid book I got yesterday—no, nor any story like it, except, perhaps, one where a Lord Lovat of former times comes home from Palestine and asks for May Maisrey.

‘And bonnier than them a’

May Maisrey, whare is she?’

It is a pretty name, is it not, mother? But I think I must write to Mrs. Bell to send me the words of ‘Young Randal,’ if it is not to be found in a book.”

“I wish you would go away to your friends now, Yolande,” the mother said, regarding her in that sad and affectionate way.

“That is so very likely!” she answered, with much cheerfulness.

“You ought to go, Yolande. Why should you remain here? Why should you be shut up here—away from all your friends? You have done what you came for—I feel that now—you need not fear to leave me alone now—to leave me in these same lodgings. I can stay here very well, and amuse myself with books and with looking at the people passing. I should not be dull. I like the rooms. I should find amusement enough.”

“And where am I to go, then?” the girl said, calmly.

“To your friends—to all those people you have told me about. That is the proper kind of life for you, at your age—not shut up in lodgings. The lady in the Highlands, for example, who wants you to spend Christmas there——”

“Well, now, dear mother,” said Yolande, promptly, “I will not show you another one of my letters if you take the nonsense in them as if it were serious. Christmas, indeed! Why, do you know where we shall be at Christmas? Well, then, at Monte Carlo! No, mother, you need not look forward to the tables; I will not permit any such wicked-

ness—though I have staked more than once—or, rather, papa staked for me—five-franc pieces, and always I won—for as soon as I had won five francs I came away to make sure. But we shall not go to the tables; there is enough without that. There are beautiful drives; and you can walk through the gardens and down the terraces until you get a boat to go out on the blue water. Then, the other side you take a carriage and drive up to the little town, and by the sea there are more beautiful gardens. And at Monte Carlo I know an excellent hotel, with fine views; and always there is excellent music. And—and you think I am going to spend Christmas in a Highland glen! *Grazie alla bontà sua!*”

“It is too much of a sacrifice. You must leave me to myself—I can do very well by myself now,” the mother said, looking at the girl with wistful eyes. “I should be happy enough only to hear of you. I should like to hear of your being married, Yolande.”

“I am not likely to be married to any one,” said she, with averted eyes and burning forehead. “Do not speak of it, mother. My

place is by you ; and here I remain—until you turn me away.”

That same night she wrote the letter which was to supplement the former one and free her conscience :—

“DEAR ARCHIE—In the letter I sent you this afternoon I was not quite frank with you ; and I cannot rest until I tell you so. There are other reasons besides those I mentioned why I think our engagement should be broken off now ; and also—for I wish to be quite honest, and to throw myself on your generosity and forbearance—why I think that we ought not to look forward to the marriage that was thought of. Perhaps you will ask me what these reasons are—and you have the right ; and in that case I will tell you. But perhaps you will be kind, and not ask ; and I should never forget your kindness. When I promised to marry you, I thought that the friendliness and affection that prevailed between us was enough ; I did not imagine anything else ; you must think of how I was brought up, with scarcely any women - friends except the ladies at the

Château, who were very severe as to the duty of children to their parents, and when I learned that my papa approved my marrying you, it was sufficient for me. But now I think not. I do not think I should bring you happiness. There ought to be no regret on the marriage-day?—no thoughts going away elsewhere? You have the right to be angry with me, because I have been careless, and allowed myself to become affectionate to some one else without my knowing it; but it was not with intention; and now that I know, should I be doing right in allowing our engagement to continue? Yes, you have the right to upbraid me; but you cannot think worse of me than I think of myself; and perhaps it is well that the mistake was soon found out, before harm was done. As for me, my path is clear. All that I said in the other letter as to the immediate future, and I hope the distant future also, is true; you have only to look at this other explanation to know exactly how I am situated. I welcome my position and its duties—they drive away sometimes sad thinking and regret over what has happened. You were always very kind

and considerate to me ; you deserved that I kept my faith to you more strictly ; and if I were to see your sister, what should I say ? Only that I am sorry that I can make no more amends ; and to beg for your forgiveness and for hers. And perhaps it is better as it is for all of us. My way is clear. I must be with my mother. Perhaps, some day, if our engagement had continued, I might have been tempted to repine. I hope not ; but I have no longer such faith in myself. But now you are free from the impatience of waiting ; and I—I go my own way, and am all the more certain to give all my devotion where it is needed. I would pray you not to think too harshly of me, only I know that I have not the right to ask ; and I should like to part friends with you, if only for the sake of the memories that one treasures. My letter is ill-expressed—that I am sure it must be ; but perhaps you will guess at anything I should have said and have not said ; and believe that I could stretch out my hands to you, to beg for your forgiveness, and for gentle thoughts of me in the future, after some years have given us time to look back. I do

not think little of any kindness that has been shown to me ; and I shall remember your kindness to me always, and also your sister's, and the kindness of every one, as it seemed to me, whom I met in the Highlands. I have made this confession to you without consulting any one ; for it is a matter only between you and me ; and I do not know how you will receive it ; only that I pray you once more for your forgiveness, and not to think too harshly ; but, if you have such gentleness and commiseration, to let us remain friends and to think of each other in the future as not altogether strangers. I know it is much that I ask, and that you have the right to refuse ; but I shall look for your letter with the remembrance of your kindness in the past. YOLANDE."

It was a piteous kind of letter ; for she felt very solitary and unguided in this crisis ; moreover, it was rather hard to fight through this thing and preserve at the same time an appearance of absolute cheerfulness so long as her mother was in the room. But she got it done ; and Jane was sent out to the post

office ; and thereafter Yolande—with something of trial and trouble in her eyes, perhaps, but otherwise with a brave face—fetched down some volumes from the little bookcase, and asked her mother what she wanted to have read.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUR OF VENGEANCE.

THE Master of Lynn had spent the whole of the morning in arranging affairs with his father's agent ; and when he left Mr. Ronald Macpherson's office he knew that he had now all the world to choose from. He was anxious to get away from this dawdling life in Inverness ; but, on the other hand, he was not going back to Lynn. He still felt angry and indignant ; he considered he had been badly used ; and it is far from improbable that if, at this moment, Yolande had been differently situated, and if Mr. Winterbourne had been likely to have given his consent, he, the Master, would now have proposed an immediate marriage, leaving his father and aunt to do or think as they pleased. But, in the present circumstances, that was impossible ; and he did not know well which way to turn, and had generally got himself

into an unsettled, impatient, irritable condition, which boded no good either for himself or for those who had thwarted him.

He returned to the Station Hotel, and was having lunch by himself in the large and almost empty dining-room when two letters were brought to him which had doubtless arrived by that morning's mail. As he was thinking of many things it did not occur to him to look at both addresses and decide which letter should have precedence; he mechanically opened and read the first that came to hand:—

“St. James's Club, Piccadilly, Oct. 31.

“DEAR LESLIE—Are you game for a cruise? I will go where you like, and start any day you like. I have never taken the *Juliet* across the Atlantic—what do you say? The worst of it is, there aint much to see when you get there; but we should have some fun going over and coming back. Drop me a line. She is at Plymouth, and could be got ready in a week.—Yours ever,

“DARTOWN.”

Now to have a 300-ton steam yacht put

at your disposal is an agreeable kind of thing ; but there were other circumstances in this case. Lord Dartown was a young Irish peer who had inherited an illustrious name, large estates (fortunately for him, some of them were in England), and a sufficiency of good looks ; but who, on the other hand, seemed determined to bid a speedy farewell to all of these by means of incessant drinking. His friends regarded him with much interest ; for he was doing it on dry champagne ; and as that is a most unusual circumstance—champagne being somewhat too much of child's play for the serious drinker—they looked on and wondered how long it would last, and repeated incredible stories as to the number of bottles this youth could consume from the moment of his awaking in his berth until his falling asleep in the same. The *Juliet* was an exceedingly well-appointed vessel ; the cook had a reputation that a poet might envy ; but the habits of the owner were peculiar, and most frequently he had to make his cruises alone. But he had always had a great respect for the Master of Lynn, who was his senior by a year or two, when

they were school-fellows together ; and sometimes in later years a kind of involuntary admiration for the firm nerve and hardened frame of his deer-stalking friend would lead to a temporary fit of reformation, and he would even take to practising with dumb-bells, which his trembling muscles could scarcely hold out at arm's length.

"Owley must be off his head altogether this time," the Master of Lynn coolly said to himself, as he regarded the shaky handwriting of the letter. "To think of facing the 'rolling forties' at this time of year! We should die of cold besides. Not good enough, Owley ; you must throw a fly over somebody else."

So he put that letter aside, and took up the other. It was the second one of the two that Yolande had sent him ; he had got its predecessor on the previous day. And now, as he read this final declaration and confession, it was with an ever-increasing surprise ; but it certainly was with no sense of dismay, or disappointment, or even the resentment of wounded vanity. He did not even, at this moment, heed the piteous appeal for charity

and kindness ; it was not of her he was thinking ; and scarcely of himself ; it was rather of the people at Lynn.

“ Now I will show them what they have done ! ” he was saying to himself, with a kind of triumph. “ They shall see what they have done, and I hope they will be satisfied. As for me, I am going my own way after this. I have had enough of it. Polly may scheme as she likes ; and they may rage, or refuse, or go to the deuce, if they like ; I am going to look after myself now.”

He picked up the other letter, and took both with him into the writing-room ; he had forgotten that he had left his luncheon but half finished. And there he read Yolande's appeal to him with more care ; and he was touched by the penitence and the simplicity, and the eager wish for friendliness in it ; and he determined, as he sat down at the writing-table, that, as far as he had command of the English language, she should have safe assurance that they were to part on kindly terms. Indeed, as it turned out, this was the most affectionate letter he had ever sent her ; and it might have been said of him, with regard

to this engagement, that nothing in it so well became him as his manner of leaving it.

“MY DEAREST YOLANDE,” he wrote, “I am inexpressibly grieved that you should have given yourself the pain to write such a letter ; and you might have known that whenever you wished our engagement to cease I should consider you had the right to say so ; and so far from accusing you or doing anything in the tragedy line, I should beg to be allowed to remain always your friend. And it won’t take any length of time for me to be on quite friendly terms with you—if you will let me ; for I am so now ; and if I saw you to-morrow I should be glad of your companionship for as long as you chose to give it me ; and I don’t at all think it impossible that we may have many another stroll along the streets of Inverness, when you come back to the Highlands, as you are sure to do. Of course, I am quite sensible of what I have lost—you can’t expect me to be otherwise ; and I daresay, if all the circumstances had been propitious, and if we had married, we should have got on very well together—for

when Polly attributes everything that happens to my temper, that is merely because she is in the wrong, and can't find any other excuse; whereas, if you and I had got married, I fancy we should have agreed very well, so long as no one interfered. But to tell you the honest truth, my dear Yolande, I never did think you were very anxious about it; you seemed to regard our engagement as a very light matter—or as something that would please everybody all round; and though I trusted that the future would right all that—I mean that we should become more intimate and affectionate—still, there would have been a risk; and it is only common sense to regard these things now, as some consolation, and as some reason why, if you say, 'Let us break off this engagement,' I should say, 'Very well; but let us continue our friendship.'

"But there is a tremendous favour I would beg and entreat of you, dearest Yolande; and you always had the most generous disposition—I never knew you refuse anybody anything (I do believe that was why you got engaged to me—because you thought it would please

the Grahams and all the rest of us). I do hope that you will consent to keep the people at Lynn in ignorance—they could only know through Polly, and you could keep it back from her—as to who it was, or why it was, that our engagement was broken off. This is not from vanity; I think you will say I haven't shown much of that sort of distemper. It is merely that I may have the whip-hand of the Lynn people. They have used me badly; and I mean to take care that they don't serve me so again; and if they imagine that our engagement has been broken off solely, or even partly, through their opposition, that will be a weapon for me in the future. And then the grounds of their opposition—that they or their friends might have to associate with one professing such opinions as those your father owns! You may rest assured, dearest Yolande, that I did not put you forward and make any appeal; and equally I knew you would resent my making any apology for your father, or allowing that any consideration on their part was demanded. It's no use reasoning with raving maniacs; I retired. But I mention this once

more as an additional reason why, if our engagement is to be broken off, we should make up our minds to look on the best side of affairs, and to part on the best of terms ; for I must confess more frankly to you now that there would have been some annoyance, and you would naturally have been angry on account of your father, and I should have taken your side, and there would simply have been a series of elegant family squabbles.

“There are one or two other points in your letter that I don’t touch on ; except to say that I hope you will write to me again—and *soon* ; and that you will write in a very different tone. I hope you will see that many things justify you in so doing ; and I hope I have made this letter as plain as can be. I have kept back nothing ; so you needn’t be reading between the lines. If you have no time to write a letter, send me a few words to show that you are in a more cheerful mood. If you don’t, I shouldn’t wonder if I broke through all social observances, and presented myself at your door—to convince you that you have done quite right, and that everything is well, and that you have given me a

capital means of having it out with the Lynn people when the proper time comes. So please let me have a few lines ; and in the meantime I hope I may be allowed to sign myself, yours most affectionately,

“ A. LESLIE.”

“ P.S.—Do you remember my telling you of the small youth who was my fag—the cheeky young party who was always smuggling champagne and pastry ? I may have told you that he is now the owner of a 300-ton yacht ? Well, he wants me to go a cruise with him. I had not intended doing so ; but it occurs to me that I might do worse—as all my affairs are settled up here ; and so, if you can write within the next few days, will you please address to me at the —— Hotel, Jermyn Street ? ”

Then he wrote :—

“ Inverness, Oct. 31.

“ DEAR OWLEY—It isn't a *compagnon de voyage* you want ; it's a strait waistcoat. You would knock the *Juliet* all to bits if you took her across now ; and a fine thing to choose winter for a visit to New York, where

the weather is cold enough to freeze the ears off a brass monkey. This letter will reach London same time as myself; so you can look me up at — Hotel, Jermyn Street; and I'll talk to you like a father about it. My notion is you should send the *Juliet* to Gib., and we could make our way down through Spain; or, if that is too tedious for your lordship, send her to Marseilles, and then we could fill up the intervening time in Paris. I have never been to Venice in a yacht, and don't remember whether you can get near enough to Danieli's to make it handy; but I suppose, even if you have to lie down by the Giudecca, there would be no difficulty about getting people to a dance on board? I'll see you through it.—Yours,

“A. LESLIE.”

And then (for now the hour of vengeance had struck) he wrote as follows to his sister:—

“Station Hotel, Oct. 31.

“DEAR POLLY—I have to inform you, and I hope you will convey the information to his Papa-ship and to Auntie Tab, that my engagement to Yolande Winterbourne is finally,

definitely, and irrevocably broken off. I hope they will be satisfied. I shall be more careful another time to keep the affair in my own hands.

“I am off for a cruise with Dartown, in the *Juliet*. Guess there’ll be about as much fluid inside as outside that noble craft. — Your affectionate brother, ARCHIE.”

And then, having folded up and addressed his letters, he rose and went outside and lit a cigar. He thought he would have a stroll away through the town and out by the harbour, just to think over this that had occurred, and what was likely to occur in the future. It happened to be a very bright and cheerful afternoon, and he walked quickly, with a sort of glad consciousness that now he was master of his own destiny, and meant to remain so ; and when he came in sight of the ruffled and windy blue sea, that had suggestions of voyaging and the seeing of strange places that were pleasant enough. Then his cigar drew well ; and that, although it may be unconsciously, tells on a man’s mood. He began to be rather grateful to Yolande. He

hoped she would quite understand his letter, and answer it in the old familiar, affectionate way, just as if nothing had occurred. It distressed him to think she should be in such grief—in such penitence. But he knew he should get some cheerful lines from her; and that, and all, was well.

By and by, however, a very uncomfortable suspicion got hold of him. He had had no very large experience of women and their ways; and he began to ask himself whether the ready acquiescence he had yielded to Yolande's prayer would please her over much. It certainly was not flattering to her vanity. For one thing, he could not wholly explain his position to her. He could not tell her that he had virtually said to his father, "Here is a way of getting back Corrievreak; and getting the whole estate into proper condition. You refuse? Very well; you mayn't get another chance, remember." He could not fully explain to her why her proposal, instead of bringing him disappointment, was rather welcome, as offering him a means of vengeance for the annoyance he had been subjected to. She knew nothing of Shena Vân. She

knew nothing of the proposal to complete the Lynn deer-forest. And so he began to think that his letter, breaking off the engagement so very willingly, might not wholly please her; and as he was well disposed towards Yolande at this moment, and honestly desiring that they should part the best of friends, he slowly walked back to the hotel, composing a few more sentences by the way, so that her womanly pride should not be wounded.

But it was a difficult matter. He went upstairs to his room, and packed his things for the journey to London, while thinking over what he would say to her. And it was very near dinner-time before he had finished this addendum to his previous letter.

“MY DEAREST YOLANDE,” he wrote, “I want to say something more to you; if you get the two letters together, read this one second. Perhaps you may think, from what I said in the other, that I did not sufficiently value the prospect that was before me at one time, or else I should say something more about losing it. I am afraid you may think

I have given you up too easily and lightly ; but you would make a great mistake if you think I don't know what I have lost. Only I did not want to make it too grave a matter ; your letter was very serious ; and I wanted you to think, and I want you to think, that there is no reason why we should not continue on quite friendly and intimate terms. Of course, I know what I have lost ; I wasn't so long in your society—on board ship, and in the dahabeeah, too, and at Allt-nam-ba—without seeing how generous you were, and sincere, and anxious to make every one around you happy ; and if it comes to that, and if you will let me say it, a man naturally looks forward with some pride to having always with him a wife who can hold her own with everybody in regard to personal appearance, and grace and finish of manner, and accomplishments. Of course I know what I have lost. I am not blind. I always looked forward to seeing you and Polly together at the ball at the Northern Meeting. But when you say it is impossible, and seem put out about it, naturally I tried to find out reasons for looking at the best

side of the matter. It is the wisest way. When you miss a bird it is of no use saying, 'Confound it, I have missed;' it is much better to say, 'Thank goodness I didn't go near it; it won't go away wounded.' And quite apart from anything you said in your letter of to-day, there was enough in your letter of yesterday to warrant us both in consenting to break off the engagement. Circumstances were against it, on both sides. Of course I would have gone on—as I wrote to you. A man can't be such a cur as to break his word to his promised wife simply because his relatives are ill-tempered—at least, if I came across such a gentleman he wouldn't very long be any acquaintance of mine. But there would have been trouble and family squabbles, as I say, if not a complete family separation—which could not be pleasant to a young wife; and then, on your side, there is this duty to your mother, which was not contemplated when we were engaged; and so, when we consider everything, perhaps it is better as it is. I daresay, if we had married, we should have been as contented as most people; and I should have

been very proud of you as my wife, naturally ; but it is no use speculating on what might have been. It is very fortunate, when an engagement is broken off, if not a particle of blame attaches to either side ; and in that way we should consider ourselves lucky, as giving no handle for any ill-natured gossip.

“Of course, Polly will be cut up about it. She always had an extraordinary affection for you, and looked forward to your being her sister. Graham will be disappointed too ; you were always *very highly valued* in that quarter. But if you and I are of one mind that the decision we have come to is a wise one, it is our business, and no one else’s.”

He stopped and read over again those last sentences.

“I consider now,” he was saying to himself, “that that is a friendly touch—No blame attaching to either side : that will please her ; she was always very sensitive, and pleased to be thought well of.”

“And even,” he continued, “if I should get reconciled to my people (about which I am in no hurry), Lynn will seem a lonely place after this autumn ; and I suppose I

shall conceive a profound detestation for next year's tenant of Allt-nam-ba. Probably two or three bachelor fellows will have the Lodge; and it will be pipes and brandy and soda and limited loo in the evening; they won't know that there was once a fairy living in that glen. But I don't despair of seeing you again in the Highlands, and your father too; and, as they say the subject of deer-forests is to be brought before the House, he will now be in a position to talk a little common sense to them about that subject. Did you see that the chief agitator on this matter has just been caught speaking about the grouse and red-deer of Iona? Now I will undertake to eat all the red-deer and all the grouse he can find in Iona at one meal; and I'll give him three months for the search."

He thought this was very cleverly introduced. It was to give her the impression that they could now write to each other indifferently on the subjects of the day—in short, that they were on terms of ordinary and pleasant friendship.

"But I daresay you will consider me prejudiced—for I have been brought up from my

infancy almost with a rifle in my hand ; and so I will end this scrawl, again asking from you a few lines just to show that we are friends as before, and as I hope we shall ever remain.—Yours, most affectionately,

“ ARCHIE LESLIE.”

It was a clever letter, he considered. The little touches of flattery ; the business-like references to the topics of the day ; the frank appeals to her old friendship—these would not be in vain. And so he went in to his dinner with a light heart, and the same night went comfortably to sleep in a saloon-carriage bound for London.

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

THE Master of Lynn, however, was not destined to get to London without an adventure—an adventure, moreover, that was very near ending seriously. Most people who have travelled in the North will remember that the night train from Inverness stops for a considerable time, in the morning, at Perth before setting out again for the south; and this break in the journey is welcome enough to passengers who wish to have the stains of travel washed from their hands and faces, to get their breakfast in peace and comfort, and have their choice of the morning newspapers. The Master of Lynn had accomplished these various duties; and now he was idly walking up and down the stone platforms of the wide-resounding station, smoking a cigarette. He was in a contented frame of mind. There had been too much trouble of late up there in

the north ; and he hated trouble ; and he thought he would find the society of "Owley" very tolerable, for "Owley" would leave him alone. He finished his cigarette ; had another look at the book-stall ; purchased a two-shilling novel that promised something fine—for there was a picture outside of a horse coming to awful grief at a steeplechase, and its rider going through the air like a cannon-ball ; and then he strolled back to the compartment he had left, vacantly whistling the while *The Hills of Lynn*.

Suddenly he was startled to find a well-known face regarding him. It was Shena Vân, and she was seated in a corner of a second-class carriage. The moment she saw that he had noticed her, she averted her eyes, and pretended not to have seen him ; but he instantly went to the door of the carriage.

"It isn't possible you are going to London, Miss Stewart ?" said he, in great surprise.

"Oh no," said Shena Vân. "I am not going so far as that."

"How far, then ?" he asked—for he saw that she was embarrassed, and only wishing to get rid of him, and certainly that she

would afford no information that wasn't asked for.

"I am going to Carlisle," said she, not looking at him.

"And alone?"

"Oh yes. But my brother's friends will be waiting for me at the station."

"Oh, you must let me accompany you, though," said he, quickly. "You won't mind?"

He did not give her the chance of refusing; for he had little enough time in which to fetch his things along from the other carriage. Then he had to call the news-boy, and present to Miss Stewart such an assortment of illustrated papers, comic journals, and magazines, as might have served for a voyage to Australia. And then the door was shut; the whistle shrieked; and the long, heavy train moved slowly out of the station.

"Well, now," said he, "this is lucky! Who could have expected it? I did not see you at the station last night."

She had seen him, however; though she did not say so.

“I did not even know you were in Inverness ; I thought you were at Aberdeen.”

“I have been in Aberdeen,” said she. “I only went back a day or two ago to get ready for going south.”

“I suppose I mustn’t ask you what is taking you to Carlisle ?—and yet, we used to be old friends, you know.”

Now Miss Stewart was a little bit annoyed at his thrusting himself on her society ; and she was very near answering saucily that it was the train that was taking her south ; but a little touch of feminine vanity saved him from that reproof. Shena Vân was rather glad to have the chance of telling him why she was going south.

“It is no great secret,” said she. “I am going to stay with the family of the young lady whom my brother will marry before long. It appears that the professorship will be worth a good deal more than we expected—oh yes, indeed, a good deal more—and there is no reason why he should not marry.”

“Well, that is good news,” said the Master, cheerfully. “And what sort of girl is she ? Nice ?”

“She is a very well-accomplished young lady,” said Shena Vân, with some dignity. “She was two years in Germany at school and two years in France, and she is very well fitted to be a professor’s wife, and for the society that comes to my brother’s house.”

“I hope she’s good-looking?”

“As to that,” said Miss Stewart, “I should say she was very pretty indeed; but that is of no consequence nowadays.”

“Why, what else is!” he exclaimed, boldly.

But this was clearly dangerous ground; and Miss Stewart sought refuge in the pages of *Punch*.

He had time to regard her. He had never seen her look so well. She had made ample use of the clear water supplied at Perth station; and her face was as fresh as the morning; while her pretty, soft, light-brown hair was carefully brushed and tended. As for her eyes—those strangely dark blue eyes that he could remember in former years brimming over with girlish merriment or grown pensive with imaginative dreams—he could not get a fair glimpse of them at all;

for when she spoke she kept them averted or turned down ; and at present she devoted them to the study of *Punch*. He began to regret those extensive purchases at the station. He made sure she was at this moment poring over Mr. du Maurier's drawings — for it is to them that women-folk instinctively turn first ; and he grew to be jealous of Mr. du Maurier, and to wish, indeed, that Mr. du Maurier had never been born—a wish, one may be certain, then formulated for the first and only time by any inhabitant of these three countries. Moreover, when she had finished with *Punch*, she took up this magazine, and that magazine, and this journal and that journal ; the while answering his repeated attempts at conversation in a very distant and reserved way, and clearly intimating that she wished to be allowed to prosecute her studies. He hated the sight of those pages. He was ready to devote the whole periodical literature of his country to the infernal gods. Why, look now, on this beautiful, shining morning, how she ought to be admiring those far-stretching Ochils and the distant Braes of Doune ! Here were the wooded banks of

Allan Water—had these no romantic associations for her, no memories of broken-hearted lovers and sad stories and the like? Had she no eye for the wide, open strath they were now entering, with the silver winding Links of Forth coming nearer and nearer, and a pale blue smoke rising afar over the high walls and ramparts of Stirling town? He verily believed that, just to keep away from him, and fix her attention on something, she was capable of reading Parliamentary Debates—the last resort of the vacant mind.

But once they were away from Stirling again, he determined at all hazards to startle her out of this distressing seclusion.

“Shena,” said he, “do I look ill?”

She glanced up, frightened.

“No.”

“I ought to look ill—I ought to look unhappy and miserable,” said he, cheerfully. “Don’t you know that I have been jilted?”

Well, she did not quite know what to say to that. He looked as if he was joking; and yet it was not a thing he was likely to mention in joke—and to her.

"It is quite true, I assure you," said he, seeing that she did not make answer. "You said you had heard I was going to be married. Well, it's all broken off."

"I am very sorry," said Shena Vân, as in duty bound; but she was clearly not very sure as to how to take the news.

"Oh please don't waste any pity on me," said he. "I don't feel very miserable. I feel rather the other way. 'Ah, freedom is a noble thing'—you remember how Barbour used to puzzle you, Shena? Yes, I am free now to follow out my own wishes; and that's what I mean to do."

"You are going to live in London, perhaps?" said Miss Stewart, regarding him—but not betraying any keen personal interest.

"Why, this is the point of it," said he, with greater animation, for at last she had deigned to lay down the newspaper, "that I don't in the least know where I am going, and don't much care. I have determined to be my own master, since my folk at home appeared disinclined to accept the programme I had sketched out. Absolutely my own master; and now, if you, Shena, would tell

me something very fine and pleasant for me to do, that would be a kindness."

"In the meantime," said she, with a slight smile, "I wish you would call me by my right name."

"Do you think I can forget the days when you were always 'Shena'?" said he, with a sort of appealing glance that her eyes were careful to avoid. "Don't you remember when I brought you the white kitten from Inverness, and how it was always pulling its collar of daisies to pieces? Don't you remember my getting you the falcon's wings? Why, I had to lie all night among the rocks on Carn-nan-Gael to get at that falcon. And you were always 'Shena' then."

"Because I was a child," said Miss Stewart, with a slight flush on the pretty, fresh-coloured face. "When we grow up, we put aside childish things."

"But we can't always forget," said he.

"Indeed, it seems easy enough to many," she answered, but with no apparent sarcasm or intention. "And you have not fixed where you are going, Mr. Leslie?" she added, with a certain formality.

“At the present moment, to tell you the truth,” said he, “I have half made an engagement to go away on a yachting cruise with a young fellow I know. But he is rather an ass. I am not looking forward to it with any great pleasure. Ah! I could imagine another kind of trip.”

She did not ask him what it was. She seemed more inclined to turn over the title-pages of the magazines.

“I can imagine two young people who are fond of each other being able to go away by themselves on a ramble through Italy—perhaps two young people who had been separated, and meeting after a time, and inclined to take their lives into their own hands and do with them what seemed best—leaving friends and other considerations aside altogether. And they might have old times to talk about as they sat at dinner—by themselves—in a room at this or that hotel—perhaps overlooking the Rhine, it may be, if they were still in Germany; or perhaps overlooking the Arno, if they were in Florence. Fancy having only the one companion with you, to go through the galleries, and see all

the pictures; and to go to the opera with you in the evening—just the one and only companion you would care to have with you. Wouldn't that be a trip?"

"I daresay," replied Miss Stewart, coldly. "But the two people would have to be pretty much of one mind."

"I am supposing they are fond of each other," said he, looking at her; but she would not meet his glance.

"I suppose it sometimes happens," said she, taking up one of the magazines, so that he was forced to seek refuge in a comic journal, greatly against his will.

By and by they were hurling onward through the solitudes where the youthful Clyde draws its waters from the burns that trickle and tumble down the slopes of "Tintock Tap." He thought it was not kind of Shena Vên to hide herself away like that. Her imagination would not warm to any picture he could draw—though that of their being together in a Florentine gallery seemed to him rather captivating. Perhaps she was offended at his having neglected her for such a long time? But she was

a sensible young woman ; she must have understood the reasons. And now had he not intimated to her that he was no longer inclined to submit to the influence of his friends ? But she did not betray any interest or curiosity.

“ I wonder whether we stop at Beattock Junction,” said he.

“ I am sure I don’t know,” she answered, civilly.

“ Has it occurred to you, Shena,” said he, with a peculiar sort of smile, “ that if any one who knew both of us happened to be at one of those stations, they might make a curious surmise about us ?”

“ I do not understand you,” Miss Stewart observed.

“ Did you ever hear of Allison’s Bank Toll-house ?” he asked.

“ No.”

“ That was where they made the Gretna Green marriages—it is just on this side the Border. I think it is rather a pity the Gretna Green marriages were done away with ; it was an effectual way of telling your friends to mind their own business. There was no

trouble about it. But it is just about as easy now, if you don't mind paying for a Special License ; and I do believe it is the best way. Your friends can get reconciled to it afterwards if they like ; if they don't like, they can do the other thing. That was what I was thinking, Shena—if some of our friends were to see us in this carriage, it wouldn't surprise me if they imagined we were on a venture of that kind."

Shena Vân blushed deeply, and was ashamed of her embarrassment ; and said with some touch of anger—

"They could not think of such nonsense !"

"It's the sensible plan, though, after all," said he, pertinaciously—and yet appearing to treat the subject as a matter of speculation. "Jock o' Hazledean, Young Lochinvar, Ronald Macdonald, and the rest of them, why they said —'Oh hang it, let's have no more bother about your friends ; if you are willing to chance it, so am I ; let's make a bolt of it, and they can have their howl when they find out.' And it answered well enough, according to all accounts. I rather think there was a row about Bonny Glenlyon ;

but then the noble sportsman who carried her off carried her off against her will ; and that is a mistake. It's 'Will ye gang to the Hielands, Leezie Lindsay ?' and if you can persuade her, she 'Kilts up her coats o' green satin' and you lift her into the saddle ; but if she doesn't see it—if she thinks it isn't good enough—you drop the subject."

"You seem to have been reading a good many songs," said Shena Vân, rather coldly. "But people don't go on in that way in ordinary life."

"Perhaps it might be better if they did, occasionally," said he. "You remember Jack Melville, of course ?"

"Oh, certainly," said she, with some eagerness, for she thought he would now leave that other perilous topic.

"Well, I remember one night, in my rooms, when we were at Oxford together, he propounded the theory that morality is merely a system of laws devised by the aged and worn-out for keeping young people straight. Of course, it was only a joke ; but it startled the boys a bit. And although it was only a joke, mind you, there was some-

thing in it ; I mean, for example, that it doesn't follow, because you're seventy, you know what is best for a person of five-and-twenty. You may know what is most prudent, from the money point of view ; but you don't necessarily know what is best. You look with different eyes. And there is a great deal too much of that going on nowadays."

"Of what ?" she asked, innocently.

"Oh, of treating life as if everything were a question of money," replied this profound philosopher—who had for the moment forgotten all about Corrievreak in his anxiety to get a peep at Shena Vîn's unfathomable blue eyes.

Miss Stewart now returned to one of those inhuman periodicals ; and he searched his wits in vain for some subject that would draw her thence. Moreover, he began to think that this train was going at a merciless speed. They smashed through Lockerbie. They had scarcely a glimpse of Ecclefechan. Kirtlebridge went by like a flash of lightning. And then he recollected that very soon they would be at Gretna Green.

“Shena,” said he, eagerly. “Shena, have you been as far south as this before?”

“Oh no,” she answered. “I have never been farther south than Edinburgh and Glasgow. But Mary Vincent is to be at the station waiting for me.”

“I did not mean that. Don’t you know that soon you will be at Gretna? Don’t you know you will soon be crossing the Border? Why, you should be interested in that! It is your first entrance into England. Shall I tell you the moment you are in England?”

“Oh yes, if you please,” said Miss Stewart, condescending to look out and regard the not very picturesque features of the surrounding scenery.

“Well, you be ready to see a lot of things at once; for I don’t know whether you actually see Gretna Green church; but I will show you the little stream that divides the two countries—that was the stream the runaway lovers were so anxious to get over. I am told they have extraordinary stories in Gretna about the adventures of those days—I wonder nobody goes and picks them up. They had some fun in those days. I wish I

had lived then. Modern life is too monotonous—don't you think so?"

"I don't know," said Shena Vân, honestly.

"I mean I wish I had lived in those days if I had had the chance of running away with somebody that made it worth the risk. Shena," said he, "supposing you had lived at that time, don't you think you would rather have had the excitement of that kind of wedding than the ordinary, humdrum sort of affair?"

"I have never thought anything about it," said Miss Stewart, with some precision—as if any properly-conducted young woman would give a moment's consideration to the manner in which she might wish to be married!

"Look, look," said he, jumping up, and involuntarily putting his hand on her arm. "Look, Shena! The village is over there—here is the river, see!—it is the Sark—and the bridge is down there, to the left of that house—that house is an inn, the last in England on the old coach-road——"

She took away her arm.

"Ah," said he, as he sat down, "many a

happy couple were glad to find their great big George the Fourth phaeton clattering over the bridge there—the triumph after all the risk——”

Then he reflected that in a few minutes' time they would be in Carlisle ; and this made him rather desperate ; for when again should he see Shena Vân—and Shena Vân alone ?

“Can you imagine yourself living at that time, Shena ; and if I were to ask you to make off for Gretna with me and get married, what would you say ?”

“You—you have no right to ask me such a question,” said Shena Vân, rather breathlessly.

“There would have been no chance of your saying ‘yes’ ?” he asked, gently.

“I don't know what you mean,” said she ; and she was nervously twisting the magazine in her hand. “I—I think you are forgetting. You are forgetting who you are—who I am—and everything that—that once happened—I mean, that nothing happened—for how could it ? And to ask such a question—even in joke—well, I think you have no right to ask me such a question ; and the absurdity of it is enough answer.”

“I did not mean it as a joke at all, Shena,” said he, quite humbly—and yet trying to catch sight of her eyes. “I asked you if you could imagine other circumstances—other circumstances in which I might ask you such a question—of course, I am very sorry if I have offended you——”

“I think there has been enough said,” said Miss Stewart, quietly, and, indeed, with a good deal of natural dignity.

Just before they were going into Carlisle station, she said—

“I hope, Mr. Leslie, you won’t misunderstand me ; but—but, of course, Miss Vincent and her friends won’t know who you are ; and I would rather they did not know. There is always silly talk going on ; it begins in amusement ; and then people repeat it and believe it.”

“I shall be quite a stranger to you when we get into the station,” said he. “And in the meantime I will say good-bye to you ; and you must tell me that we part good friends ; although you do seem to care so little about those bygone days, Shena.”

“Good-bye,” said she, holding out her hand

(but with her eyes cast down). "And perhaps I care for them as much as I ought ; but one acquires a little common sense as one grows up. I hope you will have a pleasant trip in the yacht, Mr. Leslie."

At the station he got out first and assisted her to alight ; then he got a porter for her ; and raised his hat to her with the air of a perfect stranger as she disappeared with her friends. Then he had his own things shifted into a first-class smoking compartment ; and the journey was resumed.

It was a lonely journey. There was something wrong. He already hated the *Juliet* ; and looked forward with disgust to being thrown on the society of a brainless young idiot. Nay, this was the matter ; why had he not asked Janet Stewart plump and plain ? Why had he not asked her to stop at Carstairs Junction, and go back with him to Edinburgh or Glasgow, where he could easily have found friends to take care of her until the special license had been obtained ? Why had he not dared his fate ? Sometimes women were captured by the very suddenness of the proposal.

"And as for the people at Lynn," he was

saying to himself during these perturbed meditations, “why, then they might have had some good occasion to squawk ! They might have squawked to some purpose then ! But I missed my chance—if ever there was one ; and now it is this accursed yacht and that insufferable young nincompoop !”

Things did not look altogether serene for the Right Honourable the Lord Dartown of Dartown, Co. Limerick, and Ashwood Manor, Berks.

CHAPTER XII.

A SPY.

It is quite impossible to describe the gladness and gratitude with which Yolande read the letter from the Master of Lynn, which not only gave her her freedom, but said good-bye in such a friendly fashion. For once a ray of sunlight fell on a life which, of late, had not been of the brightest.

“Yolande, what is the matter? You have had good news this morning?” said the mother, coming into the room, and noticing the radiant face of the girl.

“Yes, indeed, mother—the best I have had for many a day!” said she, and she led her mother to the window, and put her in the easy-chair, and patted her shoulder affectionately. “The best news I have had for many a day.”

“What is it? May I ask?”

For an instant Yolande hesitated; then

she laughed, and put the letter in her pocket.

“No; it would be too long to explain. But shortly I will tell you what it is, mother—why, only that one of the friends I know in the Highlands has been generous and kind to me. Is it a wonderful thing? Is it new—unexpected?”

“Ah, you ought to be with them, Yolande: not here, throwing away your time on me.”

“Ridiculous—ridiculous!” said she, in her French way; and then with a light step and a bright face she went off to get writing materials.

“DEAR ARCHIE,” she wrote,—“It is so good of you. I do not deserve it. You have made me very happy; and I hope you also will soon be reconciled at home, and everything go well. It is a great pleasure you offer me that we should always continue friends, and I hope it will be so; I know it will on my side; and one may be in Inverness some day, perhaps?—then I should be pleased to see you again, and also your sister, and Colonel Graham. But that will

be a long time if at all; for my mother, though she is much better, does not get strong as I wish, and naturally I remain with her—perhaps for always. How could I leave her? But if once she were strong enough to travel, then one might perhaps see one's friends, in the Highlands or elsewhere; and in the meantime it is consolation to know that they remain your friends, and think of you occasionally. Dear Archie, you are really too kind to me, and too flattering also, but you cannot expect a woman to fight very hard against that, so I am glad you will have as generous an opinion of me as is possible, even if it is exaggerated, and perhaps not quite true. I remember your speaking of your school-fellow very well—is he the most favourable of companions for a yachting-voyage? I suppose you are going south; for now the days are becoming cold; and we are thinking of going away to the south also. How strange it would be if my mother and I were to be seated on one of the terraces at Monte Carlo and you were to come sailing into the harbour below us. You must tell me the name of the yacht; and when we are

at Nice or Cannes, or such places, I will look in the newspapers for the lists, and perhaps hear of you.

“This is all I can write to you at the moment, but you must believe me that it does not convey to you anything like what I feel. You will excuse me—perhaps you will understand. But I will not forget your kindness.
—Your grateful YOLANDE.”

“*P.S.*—I will do as you wish about not stating any reasons ; though I am afraid that is only another part of your consideration and generosity in disguise.”

She went to get her hat and cloak.

“*Tais-toi, mon gas,
Et ne ris pas
Tout va de mal en pire,*”

she was humming to herself, most inappropriately, as she put them on. And then she went back to her mother.

“Will you get ready, mother ? I have a letter to post. And I want to see if they can get me as much more of that fur as will make a hood for your travelling-cloak—ah, you

have no idea how comfortable it is if the weather is cold and you are on a long railway journey."

"Why, you spoil me, Yolande—you make a petted child of me," the mother protested.

"Come, get on your things," said she, not heeding. "And perhaps, when we are seeking for the fur, I might get a winter-cloak for Jane. Does she not deserve a little present? She has been very attentive—has she not, do you think?"

"When she has had the chance, Yolande," the mother said, with a smile. "But you do everything yourself, child."

The alteration in the girl's manner after the receipt of that letter was most marked. Gladness dwelt in her eyes, and spoke in her voice. She grew so hopeful, too, about her mother's health, that now, when they went out for a morning stroll among the shops, she would buy this or the other small article likely to be of use to them in travelling. That was partly why she presented Jane with that winter-cloak; Jane was to be their sole attendant. And now all her talk was about orange-groves and palms, and marble terraces

shaded from the sun, and the summer-blue waters of the south.

But there was one person who certainly did not regard the breaking off of this engagement with equanimity. Immediately on receiving the brief note sent from the Station Hotel at Inverness, Mrs. Graham, astonished and indignant and angry, posted over straightway to Lynn, and told her tale, and demanded explanations. Well, they had no explanations to offer. If it were true, Lord Lynn said indifferently, it was a very good thing; but he did not choose to bother his head about it. Then pretty Mrs. Graham had a few words, verging on warmth, with her Aunt Colquhoun; but she quickly saw that that would not mend matters. Thereupon she thought she would appeal to Yolande herself; and she did so—dating the letter from Lynn Towers.

“MY DEAR YOLANDE,” she said,—“Is it true? Or has Archie been making a fool of us? Of course, he is off without a word of explanation; and I cannot imagine it possible that his and your engagement should have

been so suddenly broken off, and without any apparent cause. Forgive me for interfering, dearest Yolande ; I know it is no concern of mine—except in so far as this goes—that Archie is my brother, and I have a right to know whether he acted as he should have done, and as becomes the honour of our family. I have a right to know that. At the same time it seems *incredible* that you and he should have parted—and so suddenly—without any warning ; for although there were some disagreement here, as he probably hinted to you, still, that could have nothing to do with him and you ultimately, and he distinctly informed me that his position with regard to you was not affected, and would not be affected, by anything happening here. I hope I am not giving you pain in making these inquiries, dear Yolande ; but I think I have a right to know that my brother conducted himself honourably ; for it was through us, you may remember, that he made your acquaintance ; and both Jim and I would consider ourselves in a measure responsible if he has behaved badly. But I daresay it is not so serious as that. I know he is impa-

tient of worry ; and probably he has asked you to—well, I don't know what he could fairly ask ; and all I can say is that I hope, if matters are as he says, that he has done nothing to cause us reproach. You may well think that we shall both—I mean Jim and I—be exceedingly grieved if it is true ; for we both looked forward to having you as our sister and friend ; and you may depend on it that if there had been any *temporary* disagreement in one quarter, that would have been more than atoned for in the warmth of the welcome you would have got from us. Pray forgive me, dearest Yolande, for begging a line from you at your very earliest convenience ; it is not idle curiosity ; and I trust your answer will be that Archie's exaggeration only means that for a while he is leaving you to the duties that now occupy you, and that in time everything will be as it was. My best love to you, dearest Yolande, from your affectionate friend,

“ MARY GRAHAM.”

“ *P.S.*—Surely it *cannot* be true, or your father would have told me on the day of his

leaving Allt-nam-ba? Will you please write to Inverstroy."

Yolande remembered her promise to the Master of Lynn, and deemed it safest to say as little as possible. So she merely wrote—

"MY DEAR MARY—I hasten at once to say that your brother's conduct has been always and throughout most honourable; and that in the breaking off of our engagement it has been even more—it has been most manly and generous. Pray have no fears on that head. As for the reasons, it is scarcely worth while explaining them when it is all over and gone now. Do you think you need tell me that you would have given me welcome in the Highlands?—indeed I have had experience of that already. I hope still to be your friend; and perhaps some day, in the Highlands or elsewhere, we may be once more together; in the meantime, please remember me most kindly to your husband, and believe me, yours affectionately,

"YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE."

Yolande now seemed to consider that

episode in her life as over and done with ; and set herself all the more assiduously to the service of her mother, who, poor woman, though she could not fail to see the greater cheerfulness and content of the girl, and probably herself derived some favourable influence from that, still remained in a weak and invalidish condition which prevented their migration to the south. However, something now occurred which stopped once and for all her recurrent entreaties that Yolande should go away to her own friends and leave her by herself. One day, as she was seated in her accustomed easy-chair, looking at the people, and the sea, and the ships, she suddenly uttered a slight exclamation, and then quickly rose and withdrew from the window.

“Yolande dear !” she exclaimed, in a voice of terror. “Yolande !”

“Yes, mother !” the girl answered, looking calmly up from her sewing.

And then she saw that her mother was strangely agitated ; and instantly she rose and caught her by the hand.

“What is it, mother ?”

“I have seen that man that you know of—Romford.”

“Well, what of that?” the girl said, quietly.

“But he was looking up at the house, Yolande!” said she, obviously in great alarm. “He must know that we are here. He must have sought us out.”

“Very well; and what of that?” said Yolande; and she added, with a gentle touch of scorn: “Does he wish to be asked to have some tea with us? I think we are not at home just now.”

“But you don’t understand, child—you don’t understand,” said the mother, with a kind of shiver. “To see him was to recall everything. I was in a dream; and now it looks hideous to me; and the thought of his coming here—and wishing to take me back to that life—when I did not care whether each day was to be the last——”

“My dear mother,” said Yolande, “is it of much consequence what the gentleman wishes? It is of more consequence what I wish. And that is that you are to remain with me.”

“Oh yes, with you, Yolande—with you!” she exclaimed, and she eagerly caught both hands of the girl and held them tight. “Always with you—always, always! I am not going away from you—I dare not go away. I have asked you to go to your friends, and leave me by myself; but I will not ask it again; I am afraid; if I were alone, he might come and speak to me—and—and persuade me that his wife was the one who best knew how to take care of me—oh, when I think of it, Yolande, it maddens me!”

“Then you need not think of it, mother dear,” said the girl, pressing her to sit down. “Leave Mr. Romford to me. Oh, I will make him content with me, if he chooses to be troublesome. Do not fear.”

“If he should come to the house, Yolande?”

“The ladies do not receive this afternoon,” she answered, promptly, “nor to-morrow afternoon, nor the next day morning, nor any other time, when the gentleman calls whom you will describe to the landlady and her two girls and also to Jane. As for me, I scarcely saw him—I was too bewildered, and too anxious about you, mother; and then at last,

when he did come near to me—*pouf!* away he went on the pavement. And as for him now, I do not care for him *that!*”—and she flicked her middle finger from the tip of her thumb.

“But he may speak to us on the street, child!”

“And if we do not wish to be spoken to, is there no protection?” said Yolande, proudly. “Come to the window, mother, and I will show you something.

“Oh no, no!” she said, shrinking back.

“Very well, then, I will tell you. Do you not know the good-natured policeman who told us when the harness was wrong at the shaft, and put it right for us? And if we say to him that we do not wish to have any of the gentleman’s conversation, is it not enough?”

“I do not think I could go back now,” the mother said, absently, as if she were looking over the life, or rather the living death, she had led. “I have seen you. I could not go back and forget you, and be a trouble to you and to your father. He must be a forgiving man to have let you come to me; and yet not wise. I was content; and those people

were kind to me. Why should your life be sacrificed !”

“What a dreadful sacrifice, then !” exclaimed Yolande, with a smile. “Look around—it is a dreadful sacrifice ! And when we are at Cannes, and at San Remo, and at Bordighera, it will be even more horrible and dreadful.”

“But no, no, I cannot go back now,” she said. “The sight of that man recalls everything to me. And yet they were kind to me. I could do as I pleased ; and it was all in a kind of dream. I seemed to be walking through the night always. And indeed, I did not like the daytime—I liked to be in my own room, alone, in the evening—with newspapers and books—and it was a kind of half sleep with waking pictures—sometimes of you, Yolande—very often of you ; but not as you are now—and then they would come and torture me with telling me how badly I was treated in not being allowed to see you—and then—then I did not know what I did. It is terrible to think of——”

“Don’t think of it, mother, then !——”

“It is all before me again,” the wretched

woman said, with a kind of despair. "I see what I have been—and what people have thought of me. How can I raise myself again? It is no use trying! My husband away from me—my friends ashamed to speak of me—my child throwing away her young life to no end—why should I try?—I should be better away—anywhere—to hide myself and be no longer an injury and a shame——"

"Mother," said Yolande, firmly (for she had had to fight those fits of hopelessness before and knew the way of them well), "don't talk nonsense. I have undertaken to make you well; and I have very nearly succeeded; and I am not going to have my patient break down on my hands, and people say I am a bad doctor. I wonder what you would have said if I had called in a real doctor?—to give you physic and all the rest of it; whereas I get all kinds of nice things for you; and take you out for drives and walks; and never a word of medicine mentioned. And I don't think it is fair, when you are getting on so well, to let yourself drop into a fit of despondency; for that will only make you worse, and give me so much longer trouble before I have

you pulled through. For you are not going to shake me off—no—not at all!—and the sooner you are well, the sooner we are off to France and Italy; and the longer you are not well, the longer it is you keep me in Worthing, which perhaps you will not find so cheerful when the winter comes. Already it is cold; some morning when you get up you will see—what? nothing but snow! everything white! and then you will say it is time to fly; and that is right; but why not sooner?”

“Well, to be beside you, Yolande,” said the mother, stroking the girl’s hand, “is what I live for. If it were not for that, I should not care what happened.”

Yolande professed to treat this Mr. Romford as a person of little account; but she was in her inmost heart a trifle more disquieted than outwardly she made believe. She shrewdly suspected that he was not the sort of gentleman to be disporting himself at a watering-place merely for amusement; and she made no doubt that, somehow or other, he had found out their address, and had followed them hither in the hope of getting

her mother once more under his control. As to that, she had no fear ; but, to make sure that he had no monetary or other claim that could warrant his even knocking at the door of the house, she resolved to write at once to Lawrence and Lang. The answer was prompt ; she got it by the first post next morning ; and it said that as “our Mr. Lang,” by a fortunate accident, happened to be at the moment in Brighton, they had telegraphed to him to go along and see her ; consequently Miss Winterbourne might expect him to call on her during the course of the day.

This was far from being in accordance with Yolande’s wish ; but she could not now help it ; and so she went to her mother, and said that a gentleman would probably call that day with whom she wanted to have a few minutes’ private talk ; and would the mother kindly remain in her room for that time ?

“Not—not Romford ?” said she, in alarm.

“I said a gentleman, mother,” Yolande answered.

And then a strange kind of glad light came into the mother’s face ; and she took her daughter’s hands in hers.

“Can it be, then, Yolande? There is one who is dear to you?”

The girl turned very pale for a second or so; but she forced herself to laugh.

“Nonsense, mother. The gentleman is calling on business. It is very inconvenient; but the firm told him to come along from Brighton; and now I can't prevent him.”

“I had hoped it was something more,” said the mother, gently, as she turned to her book again.

Mr. Lang called about half-past twelve.

“I am very sorry you should have taken so much trouble about so small an affair,” said Yolande.

“But you must understand, Miss Winterbourne,” said the tall, white-haired man, with the humorous smile and good-natured eyes, “that our firm are under the strictest injunctions to pay instant heed to the smallest things you ask of us. You have no idea how we have been lectured and admonished. But I grant you, this is nothing. The man is a worthless fellow, who is probably disappointed; and he may hang about; but you have nothing to fear from him. Everything

has been paid ; we have a formal acquittance. I daresay the scoundrel got three times what was really owing to him ; but it was not a prodigious sum. Now, what do you want me to do ? I can't prosecute him for being in Worthing."

"No ; but what am *I* to do if he persists in speaking to my mother when we are out walking ?"

"Give him in charge. He'll depart quick enough. But I should say you had little to fear in that direction. Unless he has a chance of speaking to your mother alone, he is not likely to attempt it at all."

"And that he shall not have—I can take care of that," said Yolande, with decision.

"You really need not trouble about it. Of course, if he found your mother in the hands of a stranger, what happened before might happen now—that is to say, he would go and try to talk her over—would say that she was never so happy as when he and his wife were waiting on her—that they were her real friends—and all that stuff. But I don't think he will tackle you," he added, with a friendly sort of smile.

“He shall not find my mother alone, at any rate,” said Yolande.

“I hear everything is going on well?” he ventured to say.

“I hope so—I think so,” she answered.

“It was risky—I may say, it was a courageous thing for you to do; but you had warm friends looking on.”

She started, and looked up; but he proceeded to something else.

“I suppose I may not see Mrs. Winterbourne; or may I?”

“I think not,” said Yolande. “It would only alarm her, or at least excite her; and I am keeping all excitement away from her. And if you will excuse me, Mr. Lang, I will not keep her waiting. It is so kind of you to have come along from Brighton——”

“I dare not disobey such very strict orders,” said he, with a smile, as he took up his hat and opened the door.

She did not ring the bell, however, for the maid-servant; she said she would herself see him out, and she followed him downstairs. In the passage she said—

“I want you to tell me something, Mr.

Lang. I want you to tell me who it was who explained to you what you were to do for me when I arrived in London—for I think I know."

"Then there can be no harm in telling you, my dear young lady. He called again on us, about a couple of weeks ago, on his way north; and laid us under more stringent orders than ever. Mr. John Melville—was that your guess?"

"Yes," said Yolande, with her eyes downcast, but in perfectly calm tones. "I thought it was he. I suppose he was quite well when you saw him?"

"Oh yes, apparently, certainly."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lang—it is so kind of you to have taken all this trouble."

"Good-morning," said Mr. Lang, as he opened the door and went his way—and he also had his guess.

CHAPTER XIII.

SNOW AND SUNLIGHT.

YOLANDE, however, was a strict and faithful guardian ; and Mr. Romford, no doubt finding it impossible to get speech of her mother alone, had probably left the place, for they saw no more of him. Indeed, they were thinking of other matters. Yolande was anxious to get away to the south, and yet afraid to risk the fatigue of travelling on a system obviously so frail as her mother's was. She kept lingering on and on, in the hope of seeing some improvement taking place ; but her mother, though much more cheerful in spirits, did not seem to gain in strength : indeed, she seemed physically so weak that again and again Yolande postponed their departure. This, also, had its drawbacks ; for the weather was becoming more and more wintry ; and out-of-door exercise was being restricted. It was too cold for driving ; Yo-

lande had sent back the pony-carriage. Then she dared not expose her mother to northerly or easterly winds ; frequently now she had to go out for her morning walk by herself ; a brisk promenade once or twice up and down the pier being enough to send her home with pink cheeks. At last she said to her mother, with some timidity—

“I have been thinking, mother, that we might take some one’s advice as to whether you are strong enough to bear the journey.”

“I think I could go,” the mother said. “Oh yes, I should like to try, Yolande ; for you seem so anxious about it ; and of course Worthing must be dull for you.”

The girl did not mind this reference to herself.

“I have been thinking how it could be most easily done, mother. I would get a carriage here, and have you nicely wrapped up from the cold, and we should drive to Newhaven ; that would be more comfortable than the tedious railway journey round by Lewes. Then we should choose our own time of crossing when the sea was calm ; and the railway journey from Dieppe to Paris

is so much shorter than the Calais route. But to Marseilles—that is a terrible long journey——”

“I think I could do it, Yolande; I see you are so anxious to get away—and no wonder.”

“I am anxious for your sake, mother. But I am afraid to take the responsibility. Would you mind my asking some one? Would you mind my taking some advice?”

“But you are the best doctor I have ever had,” said the mother, with a smile. “I would rather take your advice than any one’s.”

“But I am afraid, mother,” she said. And then she added, cautiously, “It was not the advice of a doctor I was thinking of.”

“Whose, then?”

The girl went and stood by her mother’s side and put her hand gently on her shoulder.

Mother, my father is fretting that he can be of no service to us——”

“Oh no, no, no, Yolande!” the other cried, with a sudden terror. “Don’t think of it, Yolande—it would kill me—he will never forgive me——”

“There is no forgiveness needed, mother ; all that is over and forgotten. Mother——”

But the mere mention of this proposal seemed to have driven the poor woman into a kind of frenzy. She clung to her daughter’s arm ; and said in a wild sort of way—

“If I saw him, Yolande, I should think he was coming to take you away from me—to take you away from me!—it would be the old days come back again—and—and the lawyers——”

She was all trembling now, and clinging to the girl’s arm.

“Stay with me, Yolande ; stay with me ! I know I have done great harm and injury ; and I cannot ask him to forgive me ; but you—I have not harmed you—I can look into your face without reproach——”

“I will stay with you, mother—don’t be afraid. Now pray calm yourself ; I won’t speak of that again, if it troubles you ; we shall be just by our two selves for as long as ever you like ; and as for lawyers, and doctors, or anybody else, why, you shall not be allowed to know that they exist.”

So she gradually got her mother calmed

again ; and by and by, when she got the opportunity, she sat down and wrote to her father, saying that at present it was impossible he should come and see them, for that the mere suggestion of such a thing had violently alarmed and excited her mother, and that excitement of any kind did her most serious mischief. She added that she feared she would have to take on her own shoulders the responsibility of deciding whether they should attempt the journey ; that most likely they would try to proceed by short stages ; and that, in that case, she would write to him again for directions as to where they should go on arriving in Paris.

That indeed was what it came to ; although the girl naturally wished to share with some qualified person the responsibility of the decision. But now, as heretofore, whenever she hinted that they ought to call in a skilled physician, merely for a consultation, the mother betrayed such a nervous horror of the idea of seeing any stranger that the proposal had to be dropped.

“Why, Yolande, why?” she would say. “I am well enough—only a little weak. I

shall be stronger by and by. What could you ask of a doctor?"

"Oh, well, mother," the girl said, rather vaguely, "one might leave it to himself to make suggestions. Perhaps he might be of some help—who knows? There are tonics, now, do you see, that might strengthen you—quinine, perhaps?—or——"

"No, no," said she, in rather a sad fashion. "I have done with drugs, Yolande. You shall be my doctor; I don't want any one else. I am in your hands."

"It is too great a responsibility, mother."

"You mean to decide whether we leave Worthing?" said the mother, cheerfully. "Well, I will decide for you, Yolande. I say—let us go."

"We could go slowly—in short distances," the girl said, thoughtfully. "Waiting here or there for fine weather, do you see, mother? For example, we would not set out at this moment; for the winds are boisterous and cold. And then, mother, if there is fatigue—if you are very tired with the journey, think of the long rest and idleness at Nice—and the soft air."

“Very well, Yolande ; whatever you do will be right. And I am ready to set out with you whenever you please.”

Yolande now set about making final preparations for leaving England ; and amongst the first of these was the writing a letter to Mrs. Bell. It was little more than a message of good-bye ; but still she intimated that she should be glad to hear how affairs were going on at Gress, and also what was being done about Monaglen. And she begged Mrs. Bell's acceptance of the accompanying bits of lace, which she had picked up at some charitable institution in the neighbourhood, and which she thought would look nice on black silk.

The answer, which arrived speedily, was as follows :—

“Gress, the 11th November.

“MY DEAR YOUNG LADY—It was a great honour to me to receive the letter from you this morning, and a great pleasure to me to know that you are well, this leaving us all here in the same. Maybe I would have taken the liberty to write to you before now, but that I had not your address ; and Duncan, the keeper, was ignorant of it. And I had a

mind to ask the Hon. Mrs. Graham, seeing her drive past one day, on her return ; but they glaiket lassies that were to have told me when they saw her come along the road again were forgetful, as usual, and so I missed the opportunity. My intention was to tell you about Monaglen, which you are so kind as to ask about. It is all settled now, and the land made over to its rightful possessor ; and I may say that when the Lord, in His good time, sees fit to take me, I will close my eyes in peace, knowing that I have done better with what was intrusted to me than otherwise might have happened. But in the meantime my mind is ill at ease, and I am not thankful for such mercies as have been vouchsafed me ; because I would fain have Mr. Melville informed of what has been done, and yet not a word dare I speak. At the best he is a by-ordinar proud, camstrary man ; but ever since he has come back this last time, he is more unsettled and distant like—not conversing with people as was his custom, but working at all kinds of hours, as if his life depended on they whigmaleeries ; and then, again, away over the hills and moors by him-

self, without even the pastime of fishing that used to occupy him. 'Deed, I tried once to tell him, but my brain got into a kind of whummle; I could not get out a word; and as he was like to think me an idiwut, I made some excuse about the school-laddies, and away he went. Howsever, what's done cannot be undone. The lawyers vouch for that; and a pretty penny they charged me. But Monaglen is his, to have and to hold—whether he will or no; and the Melvilles have got their ain again, as the song says. And if any one tells me that I could have done better with the money, I will not gainsay them, for there are wiser heads than mine in the world; but I will say that I had the right to do what pleased myself with what belonged to me.

“Many's the time I wish that I had an intervener, that would tell him of it, and take the task off my hands; for I am sore afraid that did I do it myself, having little skill of argument or persuasion, he would just be off in a fluff, and no more to be said. For that matter, I might be content with things as they are, knowing that his father's land would go to him when my earthly pilgrimage was come

to an end ; but sometimes my heart is grieved for the poor lad, when I'm thinking that maybe he is working early and late, and worrying himself into a whey-faced condition, to secure a better future for himself, when the future is sure enough if he only kenned. Besides that, I jalouse there's a possibility of his going away again ; for I see there are bits of things that he put together on the day when you, dear young lady, left Allt-nam-ba, that he has not unpacked again ; and he has engaged the young lad Dalrymple at a permanent wage now, seeing that the chiel does very well with the school-bairns, though I envy not the mother that had to keep him in porridge when he was a laddie. Now that is how we are situate here, my dear young lady, since you have been so kind as to remember us ; and I would fain be asking a little more news about yourself if it was not making bold, for many's the time I have wondered whether ye would come back again to Allt-nam-ba. It is a rough place for gentle-nurtured people, and but little companionship for a young lady ; but I heard tell the shooting was good ; and if the gentlemen are coming back, I hope

you'll no be kept away by the roughness of the place, for I'm sure I would like to have a glint of your face again. And I would say my thanks for the collar and cuffs in that beautiful fine lace, but indeed there is more in my heart than the tongue can speak. It is just too good of ye; and although such things are far too fine for an old woman like me, still I'm thinking I'll be putting them on next Sabbath morning, just to see if Mr. Melville will be asking if I have taken leave of my five senses. But he has not been familiar-like since his coming back, which is a sorrow to me, that must keep my tongue tied when I would fain speak.

“This is all at present, dear young lady,
from your humble servant,

“CHRISTINA BELL.”

For one breathless second it flashed across Yolande's brain that she would become the “intervener.” Would it not be a friendly thing to do, as she was leaving England, to write and tell him, and to lay an injunction on him not to disappoint this kind creature's hopes? But then she turned away. The

past was past. Her interests and duties were here. And so—with something of a sigh, perhaps—she took to the immediate business of getting ready for the journey ; and had everything so prepared that they were ready to start at a moment's notice, whenever the weather was propitious.

And, indeed, they had fixed definitely the day of their departure when, on the very night before, the varying northerly winds that had been blowing with more or less of bitterness for some time culminated in a gale. It was an unusual quarter—most of the gales on that part of the coast coming from the south and the south-west ; but all the same the wind during the night blew with the force of a hurricane, and the whole house shook and trembled. Then, in the morning, what was their astonishment to find the sunlight pouring in at the parlour windows ; and outside, the world white and hushed under a sheet of dazzling snow ! That is to say, as much of the world as was visible—the pavement, and the street, and the promenade, and the beach ; beyond that the wind-ruffled bosom of the sea was dark and sullen in

comparison with this brilliant white wonder lying all around. And still the northerly gale blew hard ; and one after another strangely dark clouds were blown across the sky, until, as they got far enough to the south, the sun would shine through them with a strange coppery lustre, and then would disappear altogether, and the dark sea would become almost black. And then again the fierce wind would hurry on the smoke-coloured pall to the horizon ; and there would be glimpses of a pale blue sky flecked with streaks of white ; and the brilliant sunlight would be all around them once more, on the boats and the shingle and the railings and the snow-whitened streets.

Now Yolande's mother was strangely excited by the scene ; for it confirmed her in a curious fancy she had formed that during all the time she had been under the influence of those drugs she had been living in a dream, and that she was now making the acquaintance again of the familiar features of the world as she once had known them.

"It seems years and years since I saw the snow," she said, looking on the shining white

world in a mild entrancement of delight. "Oh, Yolande, I should like to see the falling snow—I should like to feel it on my hands."

"You are likely to see it soon enough, mother," said the girl, who had noticed how, from time to time, the thick clouds going over shrouded everything in an ominous gloom. "In the meantime, I shall go round, after breakfast, and tell Mr. Watherston not to send the carriage; we can't start in a snow-storm."

"But why not send Jane, Yolande? It will be bitterly cold outside."

"I suppose it will be no colder for me than for her," Yolande said; and then she added, with a smile of confession, "Besides, I want to see what everything looks like."

"Will you let me go with you? May I?" said the mother, wistfully.

"You?" said Yolande, laughing. "Yes, that is likely! That is very likely! You are in good condition to face a gale from the north-east and walk through snow at the same time!"

When Yolande went out she found it was bitterly cold, even though the terrace of

houses sheltered her from the north-east wind. She walked quickly, and even with a kind of exhilaration, for this new thing in the world was a kind of excitement; and when she had gone and delivered her message, she thought she would have a turn or two up and down the pier, for there the snow had been in a measure swept from the planks and there was freer walking. Moreover, she had the whole promenade to herself; and when she got to the end, she could turn to find before her the spectacle of the long line of coast and the hills inland all whitened with the snow; while around her the sullen-hued sea seemed to shiver under the gusts of wind that swept down on it. Walking back was not so comfortable as walking out; nevertheless, she took another turn or two; for she knew that, if the snow began to fall, she might be imprisoned for the day; and she enjoyed all the natural delight of a sound constitution in brisk exercise. Besides, she had to walk smartly to withstand the cold; and the fight against the wind was something; altogether she remained on the pier longer than she had intended.

Then something touched her cheek, and stung her, as it were. She turned and looked—soft white flakes—a few of them only, but they were large—were coming fluttering along and past her; and here and there one alighted on her dress like a moth and hung there. It was strange; for the sunlight was shining all around her; and there were no very threatening clouds visible over the land. But they grew more and more frequent; they lit on her hair, and she shook them off; they lit on her eyelashes and melted moist and cold into her eyes; at length they had given a fairly white coating to the front of the dress; and so she made up her mind to make for home, through this bewilderment of snow and sunlight. It was a kind of fairy thing, as yet, and wonderful and beautiful; but she knew very well that as soon as the clouds had drifted over far enough to obscure the sun, it would look much less wonderful and supernatural, and she would merely be making her way through an ordinary, and somewhat heavy, fall of snow.

But when she got near to the house, something caught her eye there that filled her

with a sudden dismay. Her mother was standing in the balcony; and she had her hands outstretched as if she were taking a childish delight in feeling the flakes fall on her fingers; and when she saw Yolande, she waved a pleased recognition to her. Yolande—sick at heart with dread—hurried to the door; ran upstairs when she got in; and rushed to the balcony. She was breathless; she could not speak; she could only seize her mother by the arm, and drag her into the room.

“Why, what is it, Yolande?” the mother said. “I saw you coming through the snow. Isn’t it beautiful—beautiful! It looks like dreams and pictures of long ago—I have not felt snow on my hands and my hair for so many and many years——”

“How could you be so imprudent, mother?” the girl said, when she had got breath. “And without a shawl! Where was Jane? To stand out in the snow——”

“It was only for a minute, Yolande,” said she, while the girl was dusting the snow from her mother’s shoulders and arms with her pocket-handkerchief. “It was only a

minute—and it was so strange to see snow again.”

“But why did you go out?—why did you go out?” the girl repeated. “On a bitterly cold morning like this—and bare-headed and bare-necked——”

“Well, yes, it is cold outside,” she said, with an involuntary shiver. “I did not think it would be so cold. There, that will do, Yolande; I will sit down by the fire, and get warm again.”

“What you ought to do is to have some hot brandy-and-water, and go to bed, and have extra blankets put over you,” said Yolande, promptly.

“Oh no; I shall be warm again directly,” said she, though she shivered slightly, as she got into the easy-chair by the fire, and began chafing her hands, which were red and cold with the wet snow. “It was too much of a temptation, Yolande—that is the fact. It was making the acquaintance of the snow again——”

“It was more like making the acquaintance of a bad cold,” said Yolande, sharply.

However, she got some thick shawls, and

put them round her mother, and the shivering soon ceased ; she stirred up the fire, and brought her some illustrated papers ; and then went away to get some things out again from the portmanteaus, for it was clearly no use thinking of travelling in this weather. It had settled down to snowing heavily ; the skies were dark ; there was no more of the fairy-land performance of the morning ; and so Yolande set about making themselves as comfortable as possible within doors, leaving their future movements to be decided by such circumstances as should arise.

But during that evening Yolande's mother seemed somewhat depressed, and also a little bit feverish and uncomfortable.

"I should not wonder if you were going to have a very bad cold, mother," the girl said. "I should not wonder if you had caught a chill by going out on the balcony——"

"Nonsense, nonsense, child ; it was only for a minute or so——"

"I wish you would take something hot before going to bed, mother. Port-wine-negus is good, is it not ? I do not know. I have only heard. Or hot whisky-and-water ?

Mr. Shortlands had three tumblers of it after he fell into the Uisge-nan-Sithean, and had to walk the long distance home in wet clothes ; and the rugs and shawls we had put on his bed—oh, it is impossible to tell the number.”

“No, never mind, Yolande,” the mother said. “I would rather not have any of these things. But I am a little tired. I think I will go to bed now ; and perhaps Jane could ask for an extra blanket for me. You need not be alarmed. If I have caught a slight cold—well, you say we ought not to start in such weather in any case.”

“Shall I come and read to you, mother ?”

“No, no ; why should you trouble ? Besides, I am rather tired ; most likely I shall go to sleep. Now I will leave you to your novel about the Riviera ; and you must draw in your chair to the fire ; and soon you will have forgotten that there is such a thing as snow.”

And so they bade good-night to each other, and Yolande was not seriously disturbed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A MEETING.

BUT next morning the mother was ill—nay, as Yolande in her first alarm imagined, seriously ill. She could hardly speak ; her hands and forehead were hot and feverish ; she would take nothing in the shape of breakfast ; she only turned away her head languidly. Yolande was far too frightened to stay to consult her mother's nervous fancies or dislikes ; a doctor was sent for instantly—the same doctor, in fact, who had been called in before. And when this portly, rubicund, placid person arrived, his mere presence in the room seemed to introduce a measure of calm into the atmosphere ; and that was well. He was neither excited nor alarmed. He made the usual examination ; asked a few questions ; and gave some general and sufficiently sensible directions as to how the patient should be tended. And then he said he would

write out a prescription—for this practitioner, in common with most of his kind, had retained that simple and serene faith in the efficacy of drugs which has survived centuries of conflicting theories, contradictions in fact, and scientific doubt, and which is perhaps more beneficial than otherwise to the human race so long as the quantities prescribed are so small as to do no positive harm. It was aconite, this time, that he chose to experiment with.

However, when he followed Yolande into the other room, in order to get writing-materials, and when he sat down and began to talk to her, it was clear that he understood the nature of the case well enough; and he plainly intimated to her that, when a severe chill like this had caught the system and promised to produce a high state of fever, the result depended mainly on the power of the constitution to repel the attack and fight its way back to health.

“Now I suppose I may speak frankly to you, Miss Winterbourne,” said he.

“Oh yes, why not?” said Yolande—who was far too anxious to care about formalities.

“You must remember, then, that though

you have only seen me once before, I have seen you twice. The first time you were insensible. Now," said he, fixing his eyes on her, "on that occasion, I was told a little, but I guessed more. It was to frighten your mother out of the habit that you took your first dose of that patent medicine. May I assume that?"

"Well, yes," said Yolande, with downcast eyes—though, indeed, there was nothing to be ashamed of.

"Now I want you to tell me honestly whether you believe that warning had effect."

"Indeed, I am sure of it!" said Yolande, looking up, and speaking with decision.

"You think that since then she has not had recourse to any of those opiates?"

"I am positively certain of it!" Yolande said to him.

"I suppose being deprived of them cost the poor lady a struggle?" he asked.

"Yes, once or twice—but that was some time ago. Latterly she was growing ever so much more bright and cheerful; but still she was weak; and I was hesitating about risking the long journey to the south of France. Yes,

it is I that am to blame. Why did I not go sooner? Why did I not go sooner?" she repeated, with tears coming into her eyes.

"Indeed you cannot blame yourself, Miss Winterbourne," the doctor said. "I have no doubt you acted for the best. The imprudence you tell me of might have happened anywhere. If you keep the room warm and equable, your mother will do as well here as in the south of France—until it is safe for you to remove her——"

"But how soon, doctor?—how soon? Oh, when I get the chance again, I will not wait——"

"But you must wait—and you must be patient, and careful. It will not do to hurry matters. Your mother is not strong. The fight may be a long one. Now, Miss Winterbourne, you will send and get this prescription made up; and I will call again in the afternoon."

Yolande went back to her mother's room, and sent away Jane; she herself would be nurse. On tiptoe she went about, doing what she thought would add to her mother's comfort; noiselessly tending the fire that had

been lit, arranging a shutter so that less light should come in, and so forth, and so forth. But the confidence inspired by the presence of the doctor was gone now ; a terrible anxiety had succeeded ; and when at last she sat down in the silent room, and felt that she could do nothing more, a sense of helplessness, of loneliness, entirely overcame her, and she was ready to despair. Why had she not gone away sooner before this terrible thing happened ? Why had she delayed ? They might now have been walking happily together along some sunny promenade in the south — instead of this — this hushed and darkened room ; and the poor invalid, whom she had tended so carefully, and who seemed to be emerging into a new life altogether, thus thrown back and rendered once more helpless. Why had she gone out on that fatal morning ? Why had she left her mother alone ? If she had been in the room, there would have been no venturing into the snow, whatever dreams and fancies were calling. If she had but taken courage and set out for the south a week sooner—a day sooner—this would not have happened ; and it seemed so

hard that when she had almost secured the emancipation of her mother—when the undertaking on which she had entered with so much of fear, and wonder, and hope, was near to being crowned with success—the work should be undone by so trifling an accident. She was like to despair.

But patience—patience—she said to herself. She had been warned, before she had left Scotland, that it was no light matter that lay before her. If she was thrown back into prison, as it were, at this moment, the door would be opened some day. And, indeed, it was not of her own liberty she was thinking—it was the freedom of light and life and cheerfulness that she had hoped to secure for this stricken and hapless creature whom fortune had not over well treated.

Her mother stirred, and instantly she went to the bedside.

“What does the doctor say, Yolande?” she asked, apparently with some difficulty.

“Only what every one sees,” she said, with such cheerfulness as was possible. “You have caught a bad cold, and you are feverish; but you must do everything that we want

you to do, and you will fight it off in time."

"What kind of day is it outside?" she managed to ask again.

"It is fine, but cold. There has been some more snow in the night."

"If you wish to go out, go out, Yolande. Don't mind me."

"But I am going to mind you, mother, and nobody else. Here I am, here I stay, till you are well again. You shall have no other nurse——"

"You will make yourself ill, Yolande. You must go out."

She was evidently speaking with great difficulty.

"Hush, mother, hush!" the girl said. "I am going to stay with you. You should not talk any more—it pains you, does it not?"

"A little." And then she turned away her head again. "If I don't speak to you, Yolande, don't think it is unkind of me. I—I am not very well, I think."

And so the room was given over to silence again, and the girl to anxious thoughts as to the future. She had resolved not to

write to her father until she should know more definitely. She would not necessarily alarm him. At first, in her sudden alarm, she had thought of summoning him at once; but now she had determined to wait until the doctor had seen her mother again. If this were only a bad cold, and should show symptoms of disappearing, then she could send him a reassuring message. At present she was far too upset, and anxious, and disturbed, to carefully weigh her expressions.

About noon Jane stole silently into the room, and handed her a letter, and withdrew again. Yolande was startled when she glanced at the handwriting, and hastily opened the envelope. The letter came from Inverness, and was dated the morning of the previous day: that was all she noted carefully—the rest seemed to swim into her consciousness all at once, she ran her eye over the successive lines so rapidly and with such a breathless agitation.

“MY DEAR YOLANDE,” Jack Melville wrote, “I shall reach Worthing just about the same time as this letter. I am coming to ask you

for a single word. Archie Leslie has told me—quite casually, in a letter about other things—that you are no longer engaged to him; and I have dared to indulge in some vague hopes—well, it is for you to tell me to put them aside for ever, or to let them remain, and see what the future has in store. That is all. I don't wish to interfere with your duties of the moment—how should I?—but I cannot rest until I ascertain from yourself whether or no I may look forward to some distant time, and hope. I am coming on the chance of your not having left Worthing. Perhaps you may not have left; and I beg of your kindness to let me see you for ever so short a time.”

She quickly and quietly went to the door, and opened it. Her face was very pale.

“Jane!”

The maid was standing at the window, looking out; she immediately turned and came to her mistress.

“You remember Mr. Melville, who used to come to the lodge?”

“Oh yes, Miss.”

“He will be in Worthing to-day—he will call here—perhaps soon——”

She paused for a second, in this breathless, despairing way of talking, as if not knowing what to say.

“He will ask to see me—well—you will tell him I cannot see him—I cannot see him. My mother is ill. Tell him I am sorry—but I cannot see him.”

“Oh yes, Miss,” said the girl, wondering at her young mistress’s agitation.

Then Yolande quietly slipped into the room again—glancing at her mother to see whether her absence had been noticed; and her hand was clutching the letter; and her heart beating violently. It was too terrible that he should arrive at such a moment—amidst this alarm and anxiety. She could not bear the thought of meeting him. Already she experienced a sort of relief that she was in the sick-room again: that was her place; there her duties lay. And so she sat in the still and darkened room, listening with a sort of dread for the ring at the bell below; and then picturing to herself his going away; and then thinking of the years to come, and

perhaps his meeting her; and she grew to fancy (while some tears were stealing down her cheeks) that very likely he would not know her again when he saw her, for she knew that already her face was more worn than it used to be, and the expression of the eyes changed. When she did hear the ring at the bell her heart leapt as if she had been shot; but she breathed more freely when the door was shut again. She could imagine him walking along the pavement. Would he think her unkind? Perhaps he would understand? At all events, it was better that he was gone; it was a relief to her; and she went stealthily to the bedside to see whether her mother was asleep; and now all her anxiety was that the doctor should make his appearance soon, and give her some words of cheer, so she should have no need to write to her father.

This was what happened when Melville came to the door. To begin with, he was not at all sure that he should find Yolande there: for he had heard from Mrs. Bell that she and her mother were leaving England. But when Jane, in response to his ringing of

the bell, opened the door, then he knew that they were not gone.

“Miss Winterbourne is still here, then?” he said, quickly—and, indeed, with some appearance of anxiety in the pale, handsome face.

“Yes, sir.”

He paused for a second.

“Will you be good enough to ask her if I can see her for a moment?” he said, at length. “She knows that I meant to call on her——”

“Please, sir, Miss Winterbourne told me to say that she was very sorry, but that she cannot see you.”

He seemed as one stupefied for a moment.

“Her mother is ill, sir,” said Jane.

“Oh,” he said, a new light breaking in on him—for indeed that first blunt refusal, as uttered by the maid, was bewildering.

“Not very ill, is she?”

“Well, sir,” said Jane, in the same stolid fashion; “I think she is very ill, sir; but I would not say so to my young mistress, sir.”

“Of course not—of course not,” he said, absently; and then he suddenly asked: “Has Miss Winterbourne sent for her father?”

“I think not, sir. I think she is waiting to hear what the doctor says.”

“Who is the doctor?”

She gave him both the name and address.

“Thank you,” said he. “I will not trouble Miss Winterbourne with any message.” And with that he left.

But he sent her a message—some half-hour thereafter. It was merely this:—

“DEAR YOLANDE—I am deeply grieved to have intruded upon you at such a time. Forgive me. I hope to hear better news; but do not you trouble; I have made arrangements so that I shall know.—J. M.”

And Yolande put that note with the other—for in truth she had carefully preserved every scrap of writing that he had ever sent her; and it was with a wistful kind of satisfaction that at least he had gone away her friend. It was something—nay, it was enough. If all that she wished for in the world could get as near to completion as this, then she would ask for nothing more.

The doctor did not arrive till nearly three o'clock; and she awaited his verdict with

an anxiety amounting to distress. But he would say nothing definite. The fever had increased, certainly ; but that was to be expected. She reported to him—as minutely as her agitation allowed—how his directions had been carried out in the interval ; and he approved. Then he begged her not to be unduly alarmed, for this fever was the common attendant on the catching of a sudden chill ; and with similar vague words of reassurance he left.

But the moment he had gone she sat down and wrote to her father. Fortunately Mr. Winterbourne happened at the moment to be in London ; for he had come up to make inquiries about some railway project that his constituents wished him to oppose next Session ; and he was at the hotel in Arlington Street that Yolande knew.

“DEAR PAPA,” she said,—“We did not leave yesterday as I said we should ; for the weather was so severe I was afraid to take the risk. And now another thing has occurred ; my dear mother has caught a very bad cold, and is feverish with it, so that I have called

in the doctor. I hope it will soon go away, and we be able to make the voyage that was contemplated. Alas! it is a misfortune that there was any delay. Now, dear papa, you said that you were anxious to be of service to us; and if your business in town is over, could you spare a few days to come and stay at a hotel in Worthing, merely that I may know you are there, which will reassure me, for I am nervous and anxious, and probably imagining danger when there is none. As for your coming here—no, that is not to be thought of; it would agitate my dear mother beyond expression, and now more than ever we have to secure for her repose and quiet. Will it inconvenience you to come for a few days to a hotel?—Your loving daughter,

“YOLANDE WINTERBOURNE.”

Mr. Winterbourne came down next morning—rather guessing that the matter was more serious than the girl had represented, and went straight to the house. He sent for Jane; and got it arranged that, while she took Yolande's place in the sick-room for a few minutes, Yolande should come down-

stairs and see him in the ground-floor parlour, which was unoccupied. It is to be remembered that he had not seen his daughter since she left the Highlands.

When Yolande came into the room his eyes lighted up with gladness; but the next minute they were dimmed with tears—and the hands that took hers were trembling—and he could hardly speak.

“Child, child,” said he, in a second or so, “how you are changed. You are not well, Yolande: have you been ill?”

“Oh no, papa, I am perfectly well.”

The strange seriousness of her face!—where was the light-hearted child whose laugh used to be like a ray of sunlight? She led him to the window; and she spoke in a low voice, so that no sound should carry.

“Papa, I want you to call on the doctor, and get his real opinion. It tortures me to think that he may be concealing something; I sit and imagine it; sometimes I think he has not told me all the truth. I want to know the truth, papa. Will you ask him?”

“Yes, yes, child—I will do whatever you want,” said he, still holding her hand, and

regarding her with all the old affection and admiration. Ah, your face is changed a little, Yolande, but not much, not much—oh no, not much ; but your voice hasn't changed a bit—I have been wondering this many a day when I should hear you talking to me again——”

“Never mind about me, papa,” said she, quickly. “I will give you the doctor's address. Which hotel are you staying at ?”

He told her as she was writing the doctor's address for him on a card ; and then, with a hurried kiss, she was away again to the sick-room, and sending Jane down to open the door for him.

As Yolande had desired, he went and saw the doctor, who spoke more plainly to him than he had done to the girl of the possible danger of such an attack ; but also said that nothing could be definitely predicted as yet. It was a question of the strength of the constitution. Mr. Winterbourne told him frankly who he was, what his position was, and the whole sad story ; and the doctor perfectly agreed with Yolande that it was most unadvisable to risk the agitation likely to be produced if the poor woman were to be con-

fronted with her husband. Any messages he might wish to send (in the event of her becoming worse) could be taken to her ; they might give her some mental rest and solace ; but for the present the knowledge of his being in Worthing was to be kept from her. And to this Mr. Winterbourne agreed ; though he would fain have seen a little more of Yolande. Many a time—indeed, every day—he walked up and down the promenade, despite the coldness of the weather, and always with the hope that he might catch some glint of her at the window, should she come for a moment to look at the outer world and the wide sea. Once or twice he did so catch sight of her ; and the day was brighter after that. It was like a lover.

As the days passed, the fever seemed to abate somewhat, but an alarming prostration supervened. At length the doctor said, on one occasion when Mr. Winterbourne had called on him for news—

“ I think, Mr. Winterbourne, if you have no objection, I should like to have a consultation on this case. I am afraid there is some complication.”

“ I hope you will have the best skill that

London can afford," said Mr. Winterbourne, anxiously ; for although the doctor rather avoided looking him in the face, the sound of this phrase was ominous.

"Shall I ask Sir —— to come down?" he said, naming one of the most famous of the London physicians.

"By all means! And, whatever you do, don't alarm my daughter!—try to keep her mind at rest—say it is a technical point—say anything—but don't frighten *her*."

"I will do my best," the doctor promised ; and he added : "I will say this for the young lady, that she has shown a devotion and a fortitude that I have never seen equalled in any sick-room ; and I have been in practice now for two-and-thirty years."

But all the skill in London or anywhere else could not have saved this poor victim from the fatal consequences of a few moments' thoughtlessness. The wasted and enfeebled constitution had succumbed. But her brain remained clear ; and as long as she could hold Yolande's hand or even see the girl walking about the room, or seated in a chair, she was content.

“I don’t mind dying now,” she said, or rather whispered, on one occasion. “I have seen you, and known you; you have been with me for a while. It was like an angel that you came to me; it was an angel who sent you to me. I am ready to go now.”

“Mother, you must not talk like that!” the girl exclaimed. “Why, the nonsense of it! How long, then, do you expect me to be kept waiting for you, before we can start for Bordighera together?”

“We shall never be at Bordighera together,” the mother said, absently,—“never—never! But you may be, Yolande; and I hope you may be happy there, and always; for you deserve to be. Ah yes, you will be happy—surely it cannot be otherwise—you, so beautiful and so noble-hearted——”

And at last Yolande grew to fear the worst. One evening she had sent for her father; and she went downstairs and found him in the sitting-room.

“Yolande, you are as white as a ghost.”

“Papa,” said she, keeping a tight guard over herself, “I want you to come upstairs with me. I have told my mother you were

coming. She will see you ; she is grateful to you for the kind messages I have taken to her—I—I have not asked the doctors—but—I wish you to come with me—do not speak to her — it is only to see you that she wants——”

He followed her up the stairs ; but he entered first into the room ; and he went over to the bedside and took his wife’s hand, without a word. The memories of a lifetime were before him as he regarded the emaciated cheek and the strangely large and brilliant eyes ; but all the bitterness was over and gone now.

“George,” said she, “I wished to make sure you had forgiven me, and to say good-bye. You have been mother as well as father to Yolande—she loves you—you—you will take care of her.”

She closed her eyes, as if the effort to speak had overcome her ; but he still held his wife’s hand in his ; and perhaps he was thinking of what had been, and of what—far otherwise—might have been.

CHAPTER XV.

ROME.

IT was in the month of January following, when the white thoroughfares of Rome were all shining clear in the morning sunlight, that Yolande Winterbourne stood in the spacious vestibule of the Hotel du Quirinal, waiting whilst her father read a letter that had just been given him. She was dressed in deep mourning; and perhaps that only heightened the contrast between the clearness and brightness of her English-looking complexion and ruddy-golden hair and the sallow foreign-looking faces around. And if the ordeal through which she had passed had altered her expression somewhat—if it had robbed her for ever of the light laughter and the carelessness of her girlhood—it had left in their stead a sweet seriousness of womanhood that some people found lovable enough. It was not her father only who saw and was charmed by this

grave gentleness of look, as an odd incident in this very hotel proved. At the time of the Winterbournes' arrival in Rome, there happened to be there—and also staying at the Quirinal Hotel—a famous French painter. Of course every one in the hotel knew who he was, and every one pretended not to know ; for he seemed to wish to be alone ; and he was so hard at work that when he came in for his mid-day meal—which was of the most frugal kind—he rarely spent more than ten or twelve minutes over it, and then he was off again, only pausing to light a cigarette in the corridor. Well, one day the Winterbournes went as usual into the winter-garden saloon of the hotel to have a bit of lunch, for they were going for a drive somewhere in the afternoon, and they were just about to sit down at their accustomed table, when the famous artist rose from his table and approached them. He was a little man, with a boyish face, but with careworn eyes ; his manner was grave, and yet pleasant.

“Pardon me, sir, the liberty ; but may I present myself to you ?” said he, in the

queerest of pronunciations—and he held a card between his finger and thumb.

“You do me a great honour, Monsieur,” said Mr. Winterbourne, with a low bow, and addressing him in his own tongue; and he managed dexterously to hint that Monsieur——had no need of a visiting-card with which to introduce himself.

Meanwhile Yolande had turned aside, under pretence of taking off her bonnet; and the great artist, without any circumlocution, told her father what was the object of his thus desiring to make their acquaintance. He was painting a religious subject, he said, which had great difficulties for him. He had observed Mademoiselle from time to time. She had so noble an air, an expression so tender, so Madonna-like. All that he wanted, if her father would grant the request, was to be permitted to sit at their table for a few minutes—to observe more closely, to find out what was that peculiar charm of expression. Would Monsieur forgive a painter, who could only plead that it was in the interest of his art that he made so bold a request.

Mr. Winterbourne not only gladly as-

sented, but was greatly flattered to hear such praise of Yolande from so distinguished a man ; and so she was immediately summoned, and introduced ; and they all three sat down to the little table, and had their lunch together. Yolande was in happy ignorance that she was being studied or examined in any way whatever ; and he took good care not to let her know. This little, sad-eyed man proved a cheerful enough companion. He talked about anything and everything ; and on one occasion Yolande had the happiness of being able to add to his knowledge. He was saying how the realistic decorations on the walls of this saloon—the blue skies, the crystal globes filled with swimming fish and suspended in mid-air, the painted balconies and shrubs and what not—would shock the severe theorists who maintain that in decoration natural objects should be represented only in a conventional manner ; and he was saying that nevertheless this literal copying of things for the purposes of decoration had a respectable antiquity—as doubtless Mademoiselle had observed in the houses of Pompeii, where all kinds of tricks in perspective appeared on flat surfaces—and

that it had a respectable authority—as doubtless Mademoiselle had observed in the Loggie, where Raphael had painted birds, beasts, or fishes, anything that came ready to his hand or his head, as faithfully and minutely as drawing and colour could reproduce them.

“I saw another thing than that at Pompeii,” said she, with a slight smile.

“Yes?” he said—and she did not know that all the time he was regarding the beautiful curve of the short upper lip, and observing how easily the slight pensive droop of it could be modulated into a more cheerful expression.

“I had always imagined,” said she, “that veneering and wickedness like that were quite modern inventions. Don’t they say so? Don’t they say that it is modern depravity that paints common wood to make it like oak, and paints plaster to resemble marble? But in Pompeii you will also find that wickedness—yes, I assure you, I found in more than one house beautiful black marble with yellow or white veins—so like real marble that one would not suspect—but if you examined it where it was broken you would find it was only plaster, or a soft graystone, painted over.”

“Indeed, Mademoiselle,” said he, laughing, “they were a wicked people who lived in Pompeii; but I did not know they did anything so dreadful as that.”

This was the beginning of an acquaintance-ship that lasted during their stay in Rome; but was limited to this brief chat in the middle of the day; for the famous Frenchman was the most devoted of workers. And then when he heard that the Winterbournes were likely to leave Rome, he besought the father to allow Yolande to give two or three sittings to a young American artist, a friend of his, who was clever at pastels, and had a happy knack in catching a likeness. As it turned out that M. —— did not wish merely to procure a commission for his brother-artist, but wanted to have the sketch of the beautiful young English lady for himself, Mr. Winterbourne hesitated; but Yolande volunteered at once, and cheerfully; for they had already visited the young American's studio, and been allowed to hunt through his very considerable collection of bric-à-brac—Eastern costumes, old armour, musical instruments, Moorish tiles, and the like. It was an amusement

added to the occupations of the day. Besides, there was one of the most picturesque views in Rome from the windows of that lofty garret. And so Yolande sat contentedly, trying the strings of this or that fifteenth-century lute, while the young American was working away with his coloured chalks ; and Mr. Winterbourne, having by accident discovered the existence, hitherto unsuspected, of a curious stiletto in the hollow handle of a Persian war-axe, now found an additional interest in rummaging among the old weapons which lay or hung everywhere about the studio.

And so we come back to the morning on which Yolande was standing at the entrance to the hotel, waiting for her father to read his letter. When he had ended, he came along briskly to her, and put his arm within hers.

“Now, Yolande,” said he, “do you think Mr. Meteyard could get that portrait of you finished off to-day ? Bless my soul, it wasn’t to have been a portrait at all !—it was only to have been a sketch. And he has kept on niggling and niggling away at it—why ? Well, I don’t know why—unless——”

But he did not utter the suspicion that

had crossed his mind once or twice. It was to the effect that Mr. Meteyard did not particularly want to finish the sketch ; but would rather have the young English lady continue her visits to his studio — where he always had a little nosegay of the choicest flowers awaiting her.

“What is the hurry, papa ?” she said, lightly.

“Well, here is a letter from Shortlands. He has just started for Venice. If we are to meet him there we should start to-morrow for Florence. There isn’t much time left now before the opening of Parliament.”

“Then let us start to-morrow morning,” said she, promptly, “even if I have to sit the whole day to Mr. Meteyard. But I think this is the only time we have ever been in Rome without having driven out to the Baths of Carracalla.”

“I have no doubt,” said he, “that the Baths of Carracalla will last until our next visit. So come away, Yolande, and let’s hurry up Mr. Meteyard—‘yank him along,’ I believe, is the proper phrase.”

So they went out together, into the clear white sunlight.

“And here,” said he, discontentedly, as they were going along the street of the Quattro Fontane, “is Shortlands appointing to meet us in Venice at the —— Hotel. I’m not going to the —— Hotel: not a bit of it!”

“Why, papa, you know that is where Desdemona was buried!” she exclaimed.

“Don’t I know!” said he, with a gloomy sarcasm. “Can you be three minutes in the place without being perfectly convinced of the fact! Oh yes, she was buried there, no doubt. But there was a little too much of the lady the last time we were there.”

“Papa, how can you say that!” she remonstrated. “It is no worse than the other ones. And the parapet along the Canal is so nice.”

“I’m going to Danieli’s,” he said, doggedly.

“I hope we shall get the same rooms we used to have, with the balcony,” said she; “and then we shall see whether the pigeons have forgotten all I taught them. Do you remember how cunning they became in opening the little paper bags—and in searching for them all about the room? Then I shouldn’t wonder if we were to see Mr.

Leslie at Venice. In the last note I had from him, he said they were going there; but he seemed dissatisfied with his companion, and I do not know whether they are still together."

"Would you like to meet the Master at Venice?" said he, regarding her.

A trifle of colour appeared in her cheeks; but she answered cheerfully—

"Oh yes, very much. It would be like a party of old times—Mr. Shortlands and he, and ourselves, all together."

"Shortlands has some wonderful project on hand—so he hints; but he does not say what it is. But we must not attempt too much. I am afraid you and I are very lazy and idle travellers, Yolande.

"I am afraid so, papa."

"At all events," said he, as they were going down the steps of the Piazza di Spagna—which are no longer, alas! adorned by picturesque groups of artists' models—"at all events, I must be back at the beginning of the Session. They say the Queen is going to open Parliament in person this year. Now there would be a sight for you! That is a spectacle worth going to see."

“Ah,” she said, with a quick interest, “am I to be allowed to go to the House of Commons after all? Shall I hear you make a speech? Shall I be in the grill—is it the grill they call it?”

“No, no, you don’t understand, Yolande!” said he. “It is the ceremony of opening Parliament. It is in the House of Lords; and the Queen is in her robes; and everybody you ever heard of in England is there—all in grand state. I should get you a ticket by hook or by crook, if I failed at the ballot; I heard that one was sold for £40 the last time—but maybe that was romance. But I remember this for fact, that when Lord —— returned from abroad, and found every available ticket disposed of, and couldn’t get one anyhow, he was in a desperate state because his wife insisted on seeing the show; and when he went to an official, and said that, no matter how, Lady —— must and should be admitted, that blunt-spoken person told him that he might as well try to get her ladyship into the Kingdom of Heaven. But we’ll manage it for you, Yolande. We’ll take it in time. And if we can’t secure it any other

way, we'll get you into the Reporters' Gallery, as the representative of a ladies' newspaper."

When they had climbed up to the altitudes of the young artist's studio, which was situated in one of the narrower streets between the Piazza di Spagna and the Corso, they found Mr. Meteyard rather dismayed at the prospect of their leaving Rome so soon. It was not entirely a question of finishing the portrait. Oh yes, he said, he could get the sketch finished well enough—that is, as well as he was likely to be able to do it. But he had no idea that Mr. and Miss Winterbourne were going away so soon. Would they dine with him at his hotel that evening? He was coming to England soon; might he call and see them? And would Mr. Winterbourne take with him that Persian axe in the handle of which he had discovered the stiletto? And would Miss Winterbourne allow him to paint for her a replica of a study of a Roman girl's head that she seemed rather to like, and he would have it forwarded to England, and be very proud if she would accept it?

Alas! alas! this youth had been dreaming dreams; and no doubt that was the reason of

his having dawdled so long over a mere sketch in crayons. But he was not wounded unto death. It is true, he covered himself with reproaches over the insufficiency of the portrait—although it was very cleverly done and an incontestably good likeness; and he gave them at his hotel that evening a banquet considerably beyond what a young painter is ordinarily supposed to be able to afford; and the next morning, although the train for Florence leaves early, there he was, with such a beautiful bouquet for the young lady! And he had brought her eau-de-cologne, too, for the journey, and fruit, and sweets (all this was ostensibly because he was grateful to her for having allowed him to make a sketch of her for his friend the famous French painter); and when at last the train went away out of the station he looked after it sadly enough. But he was not inconsolable, as events proved: for within three months of this sad parting he had married a rather middle-aged Contessa, who had estates near Terracina, and a family of four daughters by a former husband; and when the Winterbournes next saw him, he was travelling *en garçon* through the southern

English counties, along with two Scotch artists, who also—in order that nothing should interfere with their impassioned study of Nature—had left their wives behind them.

CHAPTER XVI.

VENICE.

JOHN SHORTLANDS, however, was delayed by some business in Paris ; and the Winterbournes arrived in Venice first. They went to Danieli's, and secured the rooms which were familiar to them in former days. But Yolande found that the pigeons had forgotten all she had ever taught them ; and she had to begin again at the beginning—coaxing them first by sprinkling maize on the balustrade of the balcony : then inveigling them down into the balcony itself ; then leaving the large windows open, and enticing them into the room ; and finally educating them so that they would peck at any half-folded packet they found on the stone floor, and get at the grain inside. The weather happened to be fine ; and father and daughter contentedly set about their water-pilgrimages through the wonderful and strange city that never seems

to lose its interest and charm for even those who know it most familiarly, while it is the one thing in the world that is safe never to disappoint the new-comer, if he has an imagination superior to that of a hedgehog. There were several of Mr. Winterbourne's Parliamentary friends in Venice at this time ; and Yolande was very eager to make their acquaintance ; for now, with the prospect before her of being allowed to go down occasionally and listen to the debates, she wished to become as familiar as was possible with the *personnel* of the House. She could not honestly say that these legislators impressed her as being persons of extraordinary intellectual force ; but they were pleasant enough companions. Some of them had a vein of facetiousness ; while all of them showed a deep interest—and even sometimes a hot-headed partisanship—when the subject of cookery and the various *tables d'hôte* happened to come forward.

Then, one night when they had, as usual after dinner, gone round in their gondola to the hotel where Mr. Shortlands was expected, they found that that bulky north-countryman

had arrived, and was now in the saloon, quite by himself, and engaged in attacking a substantial supper. A solid beefsteak and a large bottle of Bass did not seem quite in consonance with a moonlight night in Venice ; but John Shortlands held to the "*cœlum, non animum*" theory ; and when he could get Dalescourt fare in Venice or anywhere else, he preferred that to any other. He received the Winterbournes with great cordiality ; and instantly they began a discussion of their plans for filling in the time before the opening of Parliament.

"But what is the great project you were so mysterious about ?" Mr. Winterbourne asked.

"Ay, there's something now," said he, pouring out another tumblerful of the clear amber fluid. "There's something worth talking about. I've taken a moor in Scotland for this next season ; and Yolande and you are to be my guests. Tit for tat's fair play. I got it settled just before I left London."

"Whereabouts is it ?" Mr. Winterbourne asked again.

"Well, when it's at home they call it Allt-nam-ba."

“You don’t mean to say you’ve taken Allt-nam-ba for this year?”

“But indeed I have. Tit for tat’s fair play; and, although the house won’t be as well managed as it was last year—for we can’t expect everything—still I hope we’ll have as pleasant a time of it. Ay, my lass,” said he, regarding Yolande, “you look as if a breath of mountain air would do ye some good—better than wandering about foreign towns, I’ll be bound.”

Yolande did not answer; nor did she express any gratitude for so kind an invitation; nor any gladness at the thought of returning to that home in the far mountain wilderness. She sat silent—perhaps also a trifle paler than usual—while the two men discussed the prospects of the coming season.

“I’ll have to send Edwards and some of them up from Dalescourt; though where they are to get beds for themselves I can’t imagine,” John Shortlands said. “Won’t my fine gentleman turn up his nose if he has to take a room in the bothy! By the way, my neighbour Walkley—you remember him, Winterbourne, don’t ye?—has one o’ those

portable zinc houses that he bought some two or three years ago when he leased a salmon-river in Sutherlandshire. I know he hasn't used it since; and I daresay he'd lend it to me. It could easily be put up behind the lodge at Allt-nam-ba; and then they'd have no excuse for grumbling and growling."

"But why should you send up a lot of English servants, who don't know what roughing it in a small shooting-box is like?" said Mr. Winterbourne. "Why should you bother? We did very well last year, didn't we? Why shouldn't you have exactly the same people—and here is Yolande, who can set the machine going again——"

"There you've exactly hit it," said Shortlands. "For that is precisely what Yolande is not going to do, and not going to be allowed to do. It's all very well for an inhuman father to let his daughter slave away at grocers' accounts. My guest is going to be my guest, and must have a clear, full holiday as well as any of us. I don't say that she didn't do it very well—for I never saw a house better managed—everything punctual—everything well done—no breaking down

—just what you wanted always to your hand—but I say that, this year, she must have her holiday like the rest. Perhaps she needs it more than any of us,” he added, almost to himself.

It was strange that Yolande made no offer—however formal—of her services, and did not even thank him for his consideration. No; she sat mute; her eyes averted; she let these two discuss the matter between themselves.

“I am paying an additional £80,” said Shortlands, “to have the sheep kept off; so that we may have a better chance at the deer. Fancy all that stretch of land only able to provide £80 of grazing. I wonder what some of the fellows on your side of the House, Winterbourne, would say to that. Gad, I’ll tell you now what I’d like to see: I’d like to see the 666 members of the House of Commons put on to Allt-nam-ba, and compelled to get their living off it for five years.”

“They wouldn’t try,” said his friend, contemptuously. “They’d only talk. One honourable member would make a speech

three columns long to prove that it was the duty of the right honourable gentleman opposite to begin rolling off a few granite boulders; and the right honourable gentleman opposite would make a speech six columns long to show that there was no Parliamentary precedent for such a motion; and an Irishman would get up to show that any labour at all expended on a Scotch moor was an injury done to the Irish fisheries, and another reason why the Irish revenues should be managed by a committee of his countrymen meeting in Dublin. They'd talk the heather bare before they'd grow an ear of corn."

"By the way," said John Shortlands, who had now finished his supper and was ready to go outside and smoke a pipe in the balcony overlooking the Grand Canal, "I wonder if I shall be able to curry favour with that excellent person, Mrs. Bell."

"But why?" said Yolande, speaking for the first time since this Allt-nam-ba project was mentioned.

"Oh, that she might perhaps give Edwards and them a few directions when they go to

get the place ready for us. I daresay they will find it awkward at first."

"I am sure Mrs. Bell will be very glad to do that," Yolande said at once. "If you like I will write to her when the time comes.

"She would do it for your sake, any way," he said. "Well, it will be odd if we should have just the same party in the evenings that we used to have last year. They were very snug those evenings—I suppose because we knew we were so far out of the world, and a small community by ourselves. I hope Jack Melville will still be there—my heart warmed to that fellow; he's got the right stuff in him, as we say in the north. And the Master—we must give the Master a turn on the hill—I have never seen his smart shooting that you talked so much about, Winterbourne. Wonder if he ever takes a walk up to the lodge. Should think it must be pretty cold up there just now; and cold enough at Lynn, for the matter of that."

"But Mr. Leslie isn't at Lynn, is he?" said Yolande, suddenly.

"Where is he, then?"

"He had started on a yachting cruise

when I last heard from him," Yolande said. "Why, we had half hoped to find him in Venice; and then it would have been strange—the Allt-nam-ba party all together again in Venice. But perhaps he is still at Naples—he spoke of going to Naples."

"I don't know about Naples," said Shortlands, "but he was in Inverness last week."

"In Inverness! No—it is impossible!"

"Oh, but it is certain. He wrote to me from Inverness about the taking of the shooting."

"Not from Lynn?" said Yolande, rather wonderingly.

"No. He said in his letter that he had happened to call in at Macpherson's office—that is their agent, you know—and had seen the correspondence about the shooting; and it was then that he suggested the advisability of keeping the sheep off Allt-nam-ba."

"It is strange," Yolande said, thoughtfully. "But he was not well satisfied with his companion—no—not at all comfortable in the yacht—and perhaps he went back suddenly."

And then she added—for she was obviously puzzled about this matter—

"Was he staying in Inverness?"

“Indeed I don’t know,” was the answer.

“Did he write from the Station Hotel?” she asked again, glancing at him.

“No ; he wrote from Macpherson’s office, I think. You know he used often to go up to Inverness, to look after affairs.”

“Yes,” said Yolande, absently ; she was wondering whether it was possible that he still kept up that aimless feud with his relatives—aimless now that the occasion of it was for ever removed.

And then they went out on to the wide balcony, where the people were sitting at little tables, smoking cigarettes and sipping their coffee ; and all around was a cluster of gondolas that had been stopped by their occupants in going by, for in one of the gondolas, moored to the front of the balcony, was a party of three minstrels, and the clear, penetrating, fine-toned voice of a woman rose above the sounds of the violins and the guitar, with the old familiar

*Mare sì placido,
Vento sì caro
Scordar fa i triboli
Al marinaio*

—and beyond this dense cluster of boats—out on the pale waters of the Canal—here and there a gondola glided noiselessly along, the golden star of its lamp moving swiftly ; and on the other side of the Canal the Church of Santa Maria della Salute thrust its heavy masses of shadow out into the white moonlight. They were well acquainted with this scene, and yet the wonder and charm of it never seemed to fade. There are certain things that repetition and familiarity do not affect—the strangeness of the dawn, for example, or the appearance of the first primrose in the woods ; and the sight of Venice in moonlight is another of these things—for it is the most mysterious and the most beautiful picture that the world can show.

By and by the music ceased ; there was a little collection of money for the performers ; and then the golden stars of the gondolas stole way in their several directions over the placid waters. Mr. Winterbourne and Yolande summoned theirs also, for it was getting late ; and presently they were gliding swiftly and silently through the still moonlight night.

"Papa," said Yolande, gently, "I hope you will go with Mr. Shortlands in the autumn, for it is very kind of him to ask you; but I would rather not go. Indeed, you must not ask me to go. But it will not matter to you; I shall not weary until you come back; I will stay in London, or wherever you like."

"Why don't you wish to go to Allt-nam-ba, Yolande?" said he.

There was no answer.

"I thought you were very happy up there," he said, regarding her.

But though the moonlight touched her face, her eyes were cast down, and he could not make out what she was thinking—perhaps even if her lips were tremulous he might have failed to notice.

"Yes," said she at length, and in a rather low voice, "perhaps I was. But I do not wish to go again. You will be kind and not ask me to go again, papa?"

"My dear child," said he, "I know more than you think—a great deal more than you think. Now I am going to ask you a question: if John Melville were to ask you to be

his wife, would you then have any objection to going to Allt-nam-ba?"

She started back, and looked at him for a second, with an alarmed expression in her face; but the next moment she had dropped her eyes.

"You know you cannot expect me to answer such a question as that," she said, not without some touch of wounded pride.

"But he has asked you, Yolande," her father said, quietly. "There is a letter for you at the hotel. It is in my writing-case; it has been there for a month or six weeks; it was to be given you whenever—well, whenever I thought it most expedient to give it to you. And I don't see why you shouldn't have it now—as soon as we go back to the hotel. And if you don't want to go to the Highlands for fear of meeting Jack Melville, as I imagine, here is a proposal that may put matters straight. Will it?"

Her head was still held down, and she said in almost an inaudible voice—

"Would you approve, papa?"

"Nay, I'm not going to interfere again!" said he, with a laugh. "Choose for yourself.

I know more now than I did. I have had some matters explained to me, and I have guessed at others; and I have a letter, too, from the Master—a very frank and honest letter, and saying all sorts of nice things about you too, Yolande—yes, and about Melville, too, for the matter of that—I am glad there will be no ill-feeling, whatever happens. So you must choose for yourself, child, without let or hindrance—whatever you think is most for your happiness—what you most wish for yourself—that is what I approve of——”

“But would you not rather that I remained with you, papa?” she said, though she had not yet courage to raise her eyes.

“Oh, I have had enough of you, you baggage!” he said, good-naturedly. “Do you expect me always to keep dragging you with me about Europe? Haven’t we discussed all that before? Nay, but Yolande,” he added, in another manner, “follow what your own heart tells you to do. That will be your safest guide.”

They reached the hotel, and when they ascended to their suite of rooms he brought

her the letter. She read it—carefully and yet eagerly, and with a flushed forehead and a beating heart—while he lit a cigarette and went to the window, to look over at the moonlit walls and massive shadows of San Giorgio. There was a kind of joy in her face, but she did not look up. She read the letter again—and again ; studying the phrases of it ; and always with a warmth at her heart—of pride and gratitude, and a desire to say something to some one who was far away.

“Well?” her father said, coming back from the window, and appearing to take matters very coolly.

She went to him, and kissed him, and hid her face in his breast.

“I think, papa,” said she, “I—I think I will go with you to Allt-nam-ba.”

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Now it is not possible to wind up this history in the approved fashion, because the events chronicled in it are of somewhat recent occurrence—indeed, at the present writing the Winterbournes and John Shortlands are still looking forward to their flight to Allt-nam-ba, when Parliament has ceased talking for the year. But at least the story may be brought as far as possible “up to date.” And first, as regards the Master of Lynn. When, on that evening in Venice, Yolande had imagined that he was in Naples, and John Shortlands had affirmed that he was in Inverness, he was neither in one nor the other. He was in an hotel in Princes Street, Edinburgh, in a sitting-room on the first floor, lying extended on a sofa, and smoking a big cigar, while a cup of coffee that had been brought him by affectionate hands stood on a small

table just beside him. And Shena Vân, having in vain cudgelled her brains for fitting terms of explanation and apology, which she wished to send to her brother, the Professor, had risen from the writing-desk, and gone to the window; and was now standing there contemplating the wonderful panorama without—the Scott monument touched with the moonlight, the deep shadows in the valley, the ranges of red windows in the tall houses beyond, and the giant bulk of the Castle-hill reaching away up into the clear skies.

“Shena,” says he, “what o’clock is it?”

“A quarter past nine,” she answers, dutifully, with a glance at the clock on the chimneypiece.

“Capital!” he says, with a kind of sardonic laugh. “Excellent! A quarter past nine. Don’t you feel a slight vibration, Shena, as if the earth were going to blow up? I wonder you don’t tremble to think of the explosion!”

“Oh yes, there will be plenty of noise,” says Shena Vân, contentedly.

“And what a stroke of luck to have the Grahams at Lynn! Bagging the whole covey with one cartridge! It will soon be

twenty past. I can see the whole thing. They haven't left the dining-room yet; his lordship must always open the newspapers himself; and the women-folk keep on, to hear whether Queen Anne has come alive or not. Twenty past, isn't it? 'Hang that fellow, Lammer!' his lordship growls. 'He's always late. Drinking whisky at Whitebridge, I suppose. I'll send him about his business—that's what it'll come to.' Then his lordship has another half-glass of port-wine; and Polly thinks she'll run upstairs for a minute to see that the blessed Baby is all right; and we'll say she's at the door when they hear wheels outside, and so she stands and waits for the letters and papers. All right; don't be in a hurry, Polly; you'll get something to talk about presently."

He raised himself and sat up on the sofa, so as to get a glimpse of the clock opposite; and Shena Vân—whose proper title by this time was Janet Leslie—came and stood by him, and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Will they be very angry, Archie?" she says.

He had his eye fixed on the clock.

“By Jove,” he says, “I wish I was one of those fellows who write for the stage; I would tell you what’s happening at this very minute, Shena! I can see the whole thing—Polly gets the letters and papers, and goes back—‘Papa, here is a letter from Archie—from Edinburgh—what is he doing in Edinburgh?’ And then his papaship opens the letter—‘My dear father I have the honour to inform you’—‘What!’ he roars—like a stag lost in the mist. Why, don’t you hear them, Shena?—they’re all at it now—their tongues going like wild-fire—Aunty Tab swearing she knew it would come to this—I was never under proper government, and all the rest—Polly rather inclined to say it serves them right, but rather afraid—Graham suggesting that they’d better make the best of it, now it couldn’t be helped——”

“Oh, do you think he’ll say that, Archie?” said she, anxiously. “Do you think he’ll be on our side?”

“My dear girl,” said he, “I don’t care the fifteenth part of a brass farthing which of them, or whether any one of them, is on our side. Not a bit. It’s done. Indeed, I hope

they'll howl and squawk to their hearts' content. I should be sorry if they didn't."

"But you know, Archie," said Shena Vân—who had her own little share of worldly wisdom, "if you don't get reconciled with your friends, people will say that you only got married out of spite."

"Well, let them," said he, cheerfully. "You and I know better, Shena—what matters it what they say? I know what Jack Melville will say. They won't get much comfort out of *him*. 'No one has got two lives; why shouldn't he make the most of the one he's got; why shouldn't he marry the girl he's fond of?'—that's about all they'll get out of him. Polly needn't try to throw the Corrievreak fly over him. Well now, Shena, when one thinks of it, what strange creatures people are. There's Corrievreak; it's a substantial thing; it's worth a heap of solid money, and it might be made worth more; and there it was, offered to our family, you may say, to keep in our possession perhaps for centuries. And what interfered? Why, an impalpable thing like politics! Opinions—things you couldn't touch with your ten

fingers if you tried a month—a mere prejudice on the part of my father—and these solid advantages are thrust away. Isn't it odd?"

The abstract question had no interest for Shena Vân.

"I hope you do not regret it," she said, rather proudly.

"Do I speak as if I regretted it? No; not much! It was that trip to Carlisle that did it, Shena, that showed me what was the right thing to do. And after you left wasn't I wild that I had not had more courage. And then Owley became more and more intolerable—but I daresay you were the cause of it, you know, in part—and then I said to myself, 'Well, I'm off to Aberdeen; and if Shena has any kind of recollection of the old days in her heart, why, I'll ask her to settle the thing at once——'"

"Yes, but why wouldn't you let me tell my brother?" Shena Vân pleaded.

"Telling one would have been telling everybody," said he, promptly, "and they would have been at their old games. Now, you see, it isn't of the least consequence what they do or say—if they tear their hair out

it'll only hurt their own heads. And I don't see why you should worry about that letter. Why should you make apologies? Why should you pretend to be sorry—when you're not? If it bothers you to write the letter, send a copy of this morning's *Scotsman*; that's quite enough. Send them all this morning's *Scotsman*; and you needn't mark it; it will be all the pleasanter surprise for them. When they've finished with the leading articles, and the news, and the criticisms of the picture-exhibitions, and when they've looked to see how many more ministers of the gospel have been writing letters and quarrelling like Kilkenny cats, then they'll stray on to a nice little paragraph—'What?—*St. Giles's Church—Archibald Leslie to Janet Stewart*—oh, snakes!'"

"But you wrote to your people, Archie," Shena Vân said—looking wistfully at the sheet of note-paper that she had in vain endeavoured to fill with apologies and appeals for pardon.

"Well, yes, I did," the Master of Lynn admitted, with a peculiar smile. "I could not resist the temptation. But you mistake

altogether, Shena, if you imagine that it was to make apology that I wrote. Oh no ; it was not that ; it was only to convey information. It was my filial duty that prompted me to write. Besides I wished the joyful tidings to reach Auntie Tabby as soon as possible—oh don't you make any mistake, Shena—she's worth a little consideration—she has a little money of her own—oh yes, she may do something for us yet !”

“I don't like to hear you talk of your relations in that way, Archie,” said Shena Vân, rather sadly, “for if you think of them like that, how are you ever to be reconciled to them ? And you told me it would be all right.”

“And so it will, my dear girl,” said he, good-naturedly. “And this is the only way to put it all right. When they see that the thing is done, then they'll come to their senses. Polly will be the first. She always makes the best of matters—she's a good little soul. And his lordship won't do anything desperate ; he won't be such a fool as to drive me to raise money on my expectations ; and he'll soon be glad enough to have me back at

Lynn—the people there want some looking after, as he knows. Besides, he ought to be in a good-humour just now—both the forest and Allt-nam-ba let already, and Arden-greanan as good as taken.”

“But I must write—I must write,” said Shena, regarding the paper again.

“Well, it’s quite simple,” said he. “Tell your brother that, when you left Aberdeen, instead of going either to Inverness or to Strathaylort, you came here to Edinburgh, and were married, as per inclosed cutting from the *Scotsman*. The cause?—urgent family reasons, which will be explained. Then you ask him to be good enough to communicate this news to your sister, and also to send a message to the Manse; but as for apologising, or anything of that kind, I’d see them hanged first. Besides, it isn’t good policy. It isn’t wise to treat your relatives like that, and lead them to think they have a right to remonstrate with you. It’s your business; not theirs. You have quite arrived at years of discretion, my darling Shena; and if you don’t want people to be for ever jumping on you—that is, metaphorically, I mean—stop it

at the beginning, and with decision. Here," said he, suddenly getting up and going over to the writing-table, "I'll write the letter for you!"

"Oh no, Archie!" she cried, interposing. "You will only make them angry."

"My dear child," said he, pushing her away, "honey and molasses are a fool to what I can write when I want to be civil; and at the present moment I should like to shake hands with the whole human race."

So he wrote the letter, and wrote it very civilly, too, and to Shena's complete satisfaction; and then he said, as he finished his coffee—

"I don't think we shall stay long in Paris, Shena. I don't like Paris. You won't find it half as fine a town to look at as this is now. And if you go to the theatre, it's all *spectacle* and ballet; or else it's the story of a married woman running away with a lover; and that isn't the kind of thing you ought to see on your wedding trip, is it? There's no saying how far the force of example might go; and you see you began your wedded life by running away——"

“It was none of my doing, Archie,” said Shena Vân, quickly.

“No,” said he. “I think we’ll come back to London soon ; for everybody will be there at the opening of the Session ; and I want to introduce you to some friends of mine. Jack Melville says he is going up ; and he pretends it’s about his Electric Lighting performance ; but I suspect it’s more to meet the Winterbournes, when they come back from abroad, than to see the Directors of the Company. If they do adopt his system, I hope he’ll make them fork out, for he is not overburdened with the gear of this wicked world any more than myself—faith, I wish my right honourable papa would hand along the cost of that Special License, for it was all his doing. But never mind, Shena : we’ll tide along somehow ; and when we come back from our trip, if they are still showing their teeth, like a badger in a hole, I know what I’ll do—we’ll go over to the West of Ireland, for the Spring salmon-fishing, and we can live cheaply enough in one of the hotels there, either on the Shannon or out in Connemara. How would you like that ?”

“Oh, I should be delighted!” said Shena Vân, with the dark, wonderful blue eyes filled with pleasure. “For I’m afraid to go back to Inverness, and that’s the truth, Archie.”

“Oh, but we shall have to go back to Inverness, all in good time,” said he, “and it won’t do to be afraid of anything. And I think you’ll hold your own, Shena,” he added, approvingly. “I think you’ll hold your own.”

And so at this point we may bid good-bye to these adventurers (who seemed pleased enough with such fortune as had befallen them), and come along to another couple who, a few weeks later, were walking one evening on the terrace of the House of Commons. It was a dusky and misty night, though it was mild for that time of the year; the heavens were overclouded; the lights on Westminster Bridge and on the Embankment did little to dispel the prevailing gloom, though the quivering golden reflections on the black river looked picturesque enough; and in this dense obscurity such Members and their friends as had come out from the heated atmosphere of the House to have a chat or a

cigar on the terrace were only indistinguishable figures who could not easily be recognised. They for the most part were seated on one or other of the benches standing about, or idly leaning against the parapet ; but these two kept walking up and down in front of the vast and shadowy building and the gloomy windows, and they were arm-in-arm.

“ A generation hence,” said one of them, looking at the murky scene all around them, “ Londoners won’t believe that their city could ever have been as black a pit as this is.”

“ But this generation will see the change, will it not ?” said his companion, whose voice had just a trace of foreign accent in it. “ You are going to make the transformation are you not ?”

“ I ?” said he, laughing. “ I don’t know how many are all trying at it ; and whoever succeeds in getting what is really wanted will be a wonder-worker, I can tell you. What’s more, he will be a very rich man. You don’t seem to think about that, Yolande.”

“ About what, then ?”

“ Why, that you are going to marry a very poor man.”

“No, I do not care at all,” she said, or rather what she did say was, ‘I do not care aytall’—despite the tuition of her father.

“That is because you don’t understand what it means,” said he, in a kindly way. “You have had no possibility of knowing. You can’t have any knowledge of what it is to have a limited income—to have to watch small economies, and the like——”

“Ah, indeed, then!” said she. “And my papa always angry with me for my economies, and the care and the thrift that the ladies at the Château exercised always! ‘Miser’ he says to me, ‘Miser that you are!’ Oh, I am not afraid of being poor—not aytall!”

“I have a chance,” he said, absently. “So far, indeed, I have been lucky. And the public are hanging back just now; they have seen so many bad experiments that they won’t rush at any one system without examining the others; it’s the best one that will win in the end. But it is only a chance, after all. Yolande,” said he, “I wonder if I was born to be your evil genius. It was I who sent you away from your own home—where you were happy enough; and you must have

suffered a terrible anxiety all that time—I can see the change in you——”

“Oh, but I will not have you speak like that” said she, putting her other hand on his arm. “How can you speak like that to me when it is night and day that I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you. Yes; it was you who sent me; if I had not loved you before, I should love you for that now—with my whole heart. If you had known—if you had seen—what joy it was to my poor mother that I was with her for that time—that we were together—and she happy and cheerful for the first time for many, many sad years—if you had seen the gladness in her face every morning when she saw me—then perhaps you would have understood. And if I had not gone to her—if I had never known her—if she had never had that little happiness—would that not have been a sad thing? That she might have died among strangers—and I, her own daughter, amusing myself with friends and idleness and pleasure somewhere—it is too terrible to think of! And who prevented that? It is not my gratitude only; it is hers also that I give you, that I offer you; you

made her happy for a time when she had need of some kindness ; and you cannot expect that I shall forget it."

"You are too generous," he said. "It is a small matter to offer advice. *I* sacrificed nothing ; the burden of it fell on you. But I will be honest with you. I guessed that you would have anxiety and trouble ; but I knew you would be brave enough to face it ; and I knew, too, that you would not afterwards regret whatever you might have come through ; and I know that you don't regret it now. I know you well enough for that."

"And some day," she said, "or perhaps through many and many years, I will try to show you what value I put on your opinion of me, and if I do not always deserve that you think well of me, at least I shall try to deserve it—can I promise more?"

At this moment John Shortlands made his appearance ; he had come out from the smoking-room, with a cigar in his mouth.

"Look here, Yolande," said he. "I suppose you don't want to hear any more of the debate?"

"No, no," she said, quickly. "It is stupid

—stupid. Why do they not say what they mean at once—not stumbling here, stumbling there, and all the others talking amongst themselves, and as if everybody were going asleep——”

“It’s lively enough sometimes, I can assure you,” he said. “However, your father thinks it’s no use your waiting any longer. He’s determined to wait until the division is taken; and no one knows now when it will be. He says you’d better go back to your hotel—I suppose Mr. Melville will see you so far. Well,” said he, addressing Jack Melville, “what do you think of the dinner Winterbourne got for you?”

“I wasn’t thinking of it much,” Jack Melville said. “I was more interested in the Members. I haven’t been near the House of Commons since I used to come up from Oxford for the boat-race.”

“How’s the Company going?”

“Pretty well, I think; but of course I’ve nothing to do with that. I have no capital to invest.”

“Except brains; and sometimes that’s as good as bank-notes. Well,” said Short-

lands, probably remembering an adage about the proper number for company, "I'll bid ye good-night—for I'm going back to the mangle—I may take a turn at it myself."

So Jack Melville and Yolande together set out to find their way through the corridors of the House out into the night-world of London; and when they were in Palace Yard Yolande said she would just as soon walk up to the hotel where her father and herself were staying, for it was no farther away than Albemarle Street.

"Did you hear what Mr. Shortlands said?" she asked, brightly. "Perhaps, after all, then, there is to be no romance? I am not to be like the heroine of a book, who is approved because she marries a poor man? I am not to make any such noble sacrifice?"

"Don't be too sure, Yolande," said he, good-naturedly. "Companies are kittle cattle to deal with; and an inventor's business is still more uncertain. There is a chance, as I say; but it is only a chance. However, if that fails, there will be something else. I am not afraid."

"And I—am I afraid?" she said, lightly.

“No! Because I know more than you—oh, yes, a great deal more than you. And perhaps I should not speak; for it is a secret—no, no, it is not a secret, for you have guessed it—do you not know that you have Monaglen?”

He glanced at her to see whether she was merely making fun; but he saw in her eyes that she was making an actual—if amused—inquiry.

“Well, Yolande,” said he, “of course I know of Mrs. Bell’s fantasy; but I don’t choose to build my calculations for the future on a fantasy——”

“But,” said Yolande, rather shyly, “if you were told it was done? If Monaglen were already yours? If the lawyers had done—oh, everything—all settled—what then?”

“What, then? I would refuse to take it. But it is absurd. Mrs. Bell cannot be such a madwoman. I know she is a very kind woman; and there is in her nature a sort of romantic attachment to my father’s family—which I rather imagine she has cultivated by the reading of those old songs. Still she cannot have done anything so wild as that.”

“She has bought Monaglen,” Yolande said, without looking up.

“Very well. I thought she would do *that*—if she heard it was in the market. Very well. Why shouldn’t she go there—and send for her relatives, if she has any—and be a grand lady there? I have met more than one grand lady who hadn’t half her natural grace of manner, nor half her kindliness of heart.”

“It is very sad, then,” said Yolande (who was afraid to drive him into a more decided and definite opposition). “Here is a poor woman who has the one noble ideal—the dream of her life—it has been her hope and her pleasure for many and many a year; and when it comes near to completion—no—there is an obstacle—and the last obstacle that one could have imagined! Ah, the ingratitude of it! It has been her romance; it has been the charm of her life. She has no husband, no children. She has, I think, not any relation left. And because you are proud, you do not care that you disappoint her of the one hope of her life—that you break her heart?”

“Ah, Yolande,” said he, with a smile, “Mrs. Bell has got hold of you with her old Scotch songs—she has been walking you through fairyland, and your reason has got perverted. What do you think people would say if I were to take away this poor woman’s money from her relatives—or from her friends and acquaintances, if she has no relatives? It is too absurd. If I were the promoter of a swindling company, now, I could sharp it out of her that way; that would be all right, and I should remain an honoured member of society; but this won’t do; this won’t do at all. You may be as dishonest as you like, and so long as you don’t give the law a grip on you, and so long as you keep rich enough, you can have plenty of public respect; but you can’t afford to become ridiculous. No, no, Yolande; if Mrs. Bell has bought Monaglen, let her keep it; I hope she will install herself there, and play Lady Bountiful—she can do that naturally enough; and when she has had her will of it, then, if she likes to leave it to me at her death, I shall be her obliged and humble servant. But in the meantime, my dearest Yolande, as you and I

have got to face the world together, I think we'd better have as little fantasy around us as possible—except the fantasy of affection, and the more of that we have the better."

When they got to the hotel, they paused outside the glass-door to say good-bye.

"Good-night, dearest Yolande."

"Good-night, dear Jack."

And then she looked up at this broad-shouldered, pale, dark man, and there was a curious smile in her beautiful, sweet, and serious face.

"Is it true," she asked, "that a woman always has her own way?"

"They say so, at all events," was the answer.

"And if two women have the same wish and the same hope, and only one man to say no, then it is still more likely he will be defeated?"

"I shouldn't say he had much chance myself," Jack Melville said; "but what's your conundrum, now, sweetheart?"

"Then I foresee something," she said. "Yes, I see that we shall have to ask Mr. Leslie to be very kind, and to lend us

Duncan Macdonald for an evening. Oh, not so very far away—not so far away as you imagine; because, you know, when we have all gone up to Monaglen House, and we are all inside, going over the rooms—and looking here and there with a great curiosity and interest—or perhaps we are all seated in the dining-room, having a little chat together—then what will you say if all at once you heard the pipes outside, and what do you think Duncan will play, on such an evening as that if not *Melville's Welcome Home?*”

THE END.

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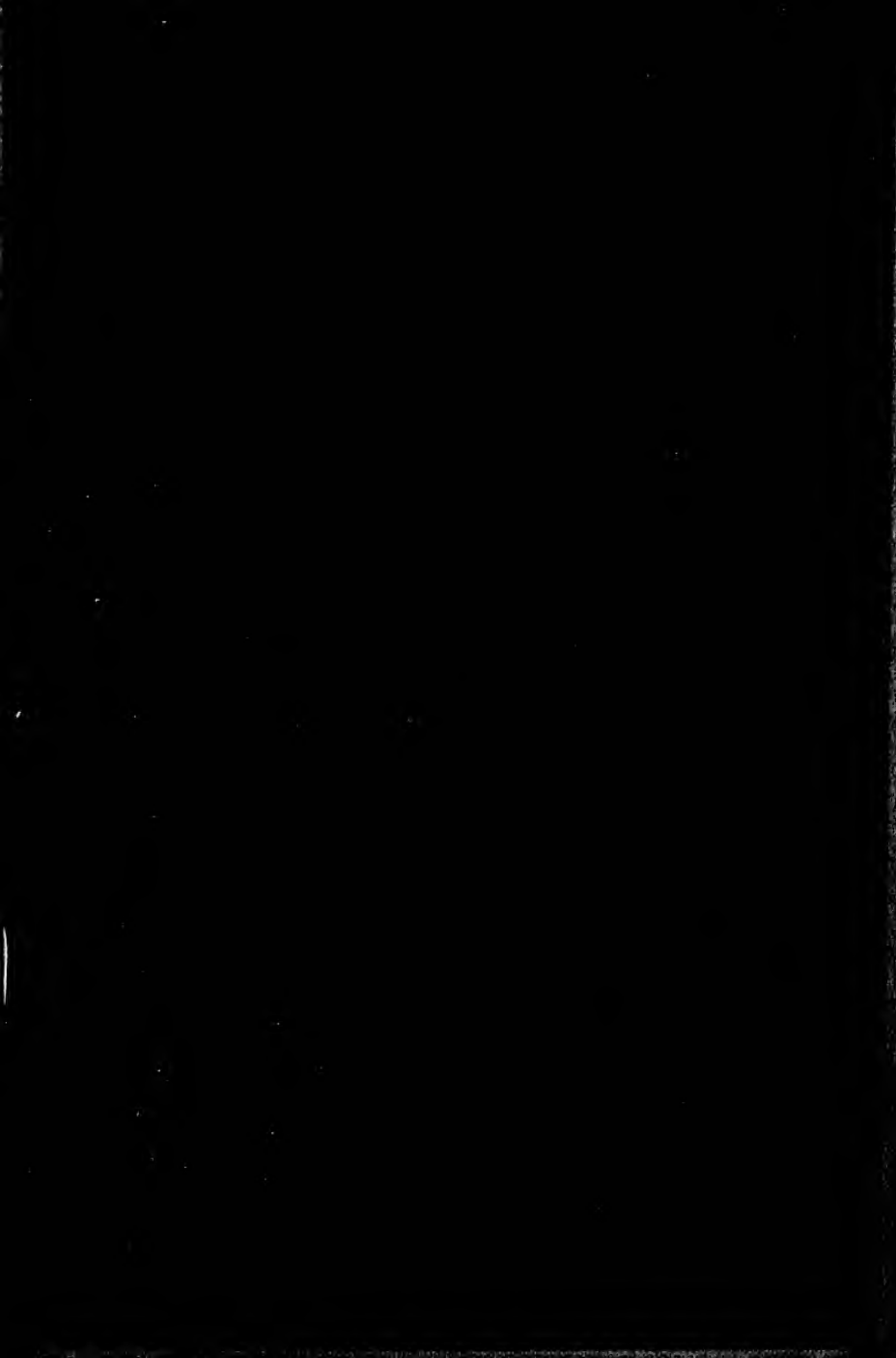
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